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IMRAN CHOHAN

Enhancing Employability Super Skills among University Students – Educational Design Research about an Employability Course Design Solution

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ABSTRACT

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Today, an employee or entrepreneur must not only demonstrate competence in his or her field of study, but also in soft skills such as communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership. Thus, it is beneficial to consider whether graduating master's degree holders possess the necessary soft skills that are needed at work today. This research discusses graduates' employability skills to answer the following question:

How can students' super skills of employability (communication skills, motivation/initiative skills, and leadership skills) be enhanced by using feedback, reflection, and experiential learning course?

The research for this thesis was conducted at the University of Lapland and produced a new definition of graduate employability and model. The research approach used in this research is educational design research (EDR). The research was conducted in two iterations namely Phase I and Phase II in which a course designed to enhance students' employability super skills was implemented and evaluated for further development.

The participants were master's degree students from the General Education and Arts Faculties at the University of Lapland. Fifteen students in two phases participated in the course. The data was collected in the form of student reflections, feedback, observation notes, and interviews. Content analysis was used to analyse the data.

The data was analysed and divided into categories for each super skill. In the communication skills category, the four main qualities that were found to be essential are listening, building trust, reflection, and inclusion. The four main skills that helped enhance students' motivation and initiative super skills are cooperation, participation, preparation, and experiential learning. Lastly, qualities that helped students enhance their leadership skills are listening, acceptance, understanding, and growth. The model 'SkillCraft: A Curiosity-Enhanced Employability Super Skills

SCESS' is a second design solution and an outcome of this research. The research, furthermore, provides a deeper understanding of the conceptual connection about the employability super skills and provides practical tools for developing them during university education.

Keywords: Graduate employability, Reflection, Feedback, Experiential learning, Educational design research

TIIVISTELMÄ

IMRAN CHOHAN

Yliopisto-opiskelijoiden työllistymisen supertaidot – Kasvatustieteellinen design-tutkimus työllistymistaitoja edistävän kurssin kehittämisestä

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Työmarkkinat vaikuttavat opetuksen ja oppimisen menetelmiin, samoin työllistymisen kompetenssit muuttuvat työmarkkinoiden muuttuessa. Nykypäivän työntekijän tai yrittäjän ei tarvitse osoittaa kompentenssiaan vain omalla erityisalallaan vaan myös niin sanotuissa pehmeissä taidoissa, kuten kommunikaatio-, motivaatio-, aloitteellisuus- ja johtamistaidoissa. On tarpeen tunnistaa, missä määrin valmistuvilla maistereilla on näitä työssä tarvittavia taitoja. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan maistereiden työllistymistaitoja seuraavan tutkimuskysymyksen valossa:

Kuinka opiskelijoiden työllistymisen supertaitoja (kommunikaatio-, motivaatio-, aloitteellisuus- ja johtamistaidot) voidaan kehittää käyttämällä palautteeseen, reflektioon ja kokemukselliseen oppimiseen nojaavissa työpajoissa?

Tutkimus toteutettiin Lapin yliopistossa. Se tuotti valmistuvan opiskelijan työllistymisen käsitteen tarkasteluun uuden mallin. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnettiin kasvatustieteellistä design-tutkimusta, jossa toteutettiin kaksi vaihetta. Kummassakin vaiheessa toteutettiin opintojakso, jossa opiskelijoiden työllistymistaitoja kehitettiin. Osallistujat olivat yleisen kasvatustieteen ja taiteen maisterivaiheen osallistujia ja yhteensä 15 opiskelijaa osallistui tutkimuksessa rakennetulle kurssille. Aineisto kerättiin opiskelijoiden reflektion, palautteiden, tutkijan tekemien havaintomuistiinpanojen, kyselyjen ja haastattelujen muodossa. Aineisto analysoitiin sisällön analyysin keinoin.

Aineisto analysoitiin ja luokiteltiin supertaitojen mukaisesti. Kommunikaatiotaidoissa korostuivat kuuntelun, luottamuksen rakentamisen, reflektoinnin ja inkluusion taidot. Motivaatio- ja aloitteellisuustaidoissa merkityksellisiksi nousivat yhteistyön, osallistumisen, valmistautumisen ja kokemuksellisen oppimisen avulla kehittyminen. Johtamistaidoissa kehittymisessä taasen korostuivat kuuntelun, hyväksynnän, ymmärtämisen ja kasvun taidot.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena synty työllistymistaitojen rakentamisen malli “SkillCraft”. Tutkimus tuottaa syvempää käsitteellistä ymmärrystä työllistymistaidoista sekä antaa välineitä niiden kehittämiseen osana yliopisto-opintoja.

Avainsanat: Työllistymistaidot, Reflektio, Palaute, Kokemuksellinen oppiminen, Design-tutkimus

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I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the students who participated in my research. Their involvement and contributions were pivotal to the success of this study, and I deeply appreciate their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement and support throughout this journey. Their belief in me provided the strength and motivation I needed to persevere through challenges.

A key turning point in my research occurred when I met Professor Shelly Kinash at a conference on education in Florence. During our discussion following my presentation on facilitation, we identified an exciting opportunity to integrate soft skills into my facilitation approach. This conversation laid the foundation for my work on enhancing soft skills learning in university students, a focus that has deeply enriched this thesis.

I am grateful to the Lapland Regional Fund for their financial support, which provided me with the resources to dedicate myself fully to this research for one year. I ama also grateful to Chau-Hsien Kuo and Vu Nguyen Vinh Ha for designing the book cover.

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Rovaniemi, January 2025
Imran Chohan

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LIST of ABBREVIATIONS

CareerEDGE – Career, Emotional intelligence, Degree subject, Generic skills & Experience
DCM – The Divergent and Convergent Model
DECM – The Divergent, Explore, and Convergent Model
DBR – Design-Based Research
EDR – Educational Design Research
HE – Higher Education
HEI – Higher Education Institutes
IMGD – Integrated Model of Group Dynamics
SCESS – Skillscraft: A Curiosity Enhanced Employability Super Skills Model
USEM – Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, and Metacognition
4Rs – Reporting (Repeat), Relating (Refer), Reasoning (Review), and Reconstructing (Reflect)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Research

University students are expected to gain employability after their studies. However, when students apply for jobs and go to interviews, they are asked about soft skills. The realization of the important role soft skills are playing in enhancing the abilities of students to gain employability has increased (Bennett et al., 1999; Aničić & Bušelić, 2020; Bušelić & Aničić, 2019; Saito & Pham, 2019; Sarkar et al., 2020; Crespí & Ramos, 2021; Tight, 2021; El Messaoudi & Mrah, 2022; Tuononen et al., 2022; Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2023; Zouaoui, Drolet & Briand, 2023). Due to globalization and access to talent worldwide, there is a higher competition among graduates to gain employability; therefore, the need for students to be equipped with not only academic skills but also practical skills (soft skills) that can be used in the real world has become increasingly important for students (Kinash et al., 2015; Kinash & Crane, 2016; Lohberger & Braun, 2022).

Amid this increasing implementation and recognition of soft skills in education (Emanuel et al., 2021; Okolie et al., 2021; Sarkar et al., 2021), a question is raised: How can university students truly keep up, learn and internalize these soft skills that are now so important for success in both academic and professional realms in the ever-changing job market? My exploration into the matter of theory and practice in this thesis is to understand soft skills, implement them in the class, enhance the students' employability chances, and through this process help students gain employability super skills. Employability super skills are four soft skills (communication skills, motivation skills, initiative skills, and leadership skills) named by Kinash & Crane (2016).

The importance of soft skills for students is emphasized by many researchers (Glenn, 2008; Watts & Watts, 2008; Klaus, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Kellerman, 2010; Carnevale and Smith, 2013; Shukla & Kumar, 2017). Students need not just good grades but a strong skillset in soft skills as well (Schulz, 2008; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Khakurel & Porras, 2020). Such expertise can be developed in a variety of ways and needs to be embedded into the current education system (Tang, 2019). Research has suggested that the integration of soft skills in the curriculum is said to increase the chances of candidates getting a job (Perreault, 2004; Wilhelm, 2004; Glenn, 2008; James & James, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2010). Joint research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and the Standard Research Centre

showed that 85% of job success is dependent upon having good people skills and soft skills, and 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (substance-specific skills) (Shukla & Kumar, 2017). Employers expect new graduates to have a sound set of soft skills, and new graduates are falling short of their expectations (National Union of Students, 2011; Kinash et al., 2016; Shukla & Kumar, 2017). This means that employability is somewhat dependent upon the employability skills that a candidate exhibits. Therefore, education along with relevant training in soft skills is essential to gain and sustain employability in the global economy. (Judge & Bono, 2001; Bridgstock, 2009; Kellerman, 2010; Kirschner & van Merriënboer, 2013; Dean, 2017; Dragon, 2017; Nghia, 2019; Karimi, 2020). Thus, the importance of having a system that helps students develop core soft skills is vital in enhancing their employability (Qizi, 2020).

It is imperative at this stage to distinguish between substance-specific skills (domain-specific skills), technical skills, practical skills, soft skills, general skills, and employability skills. Expertise with knowledge in a specific subject which requires specialized knowledge or training comes under substance-specific skills (domain-specific skills) (Tricot & Sweller, 2014; Döringer, 2021): for example, a doctor's understanding of the human body in a specific organ or body parts like the heart, eyes, and lungs or an engineer's knowledge or expertise in fields like machine learning or programming. The practical ability and knowledge required to perform specific tasks and the ability to use tools, equipment, and software are what is known as technical skills, a sub-set of substance-specific skills (Nasir et al., 2011, January; Ritzhaupt & Kumar, 2015; Wang et al., 2023). The ability to acquire theoretical knowledge in a specific field and the technical skills that go with that knowledge and the combination of these skills used in the real world can be defined as practical skills (Hampton, 2002; Yaghoubi, 2010; Burxanovna, 2022). Soft skills are the set of abilities and qualities that a person has that help said individual work effectively with others in all sorts of situations (Binsaeed et al., 2017; Sekhar, 2019; Lyu & Liu, 2021; Doherty & Stephens, 2023). These skills are intangible, and some of the soft skills are communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, creativity, time management, leadership, motivation, initiative, empathy, and emotional intelligence. The competency to apply soft skills can be described as general skills. General skills are not specific to one field. These skills can be applied to various contexts. Some of the general skills include critical thinking, literacy (computer and media), communication, and leadership. Finally, employability skills, also known as career skills or job-readiness skills, are the abilities and skills that make an employee very desirable to employers (Sumanasiri, et al., 2015; Räty et al., 2020; Sokhanvar et al., 2021; Riviezzo et al., 2023). Employability skills enhance the chance of employment for the person who can then demonstrate to the potential employers' skills such as communication skills, skills in working with teams, time-management skills, and adaptability to situations (open-mindedness, acceptance, and the ability

to listen). (Ornellas et al., 2019; Rakowska & de Juana-Espinosa, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2023).

I will reference substance-specific, technical, and practical skills as hard skills, whereas I will use the term *soft skill* when I refer to intangible skills. Employability skills mentioned here are a combination of both soft and hard skills. Therefore, when I mention both skills, I will use the term *employability skills*. Lastly, there are employability super skills. I will use this term to refer to four specific soft skills, namely, communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership skills. These skills are named after the study done by Kinash et al., 2016. Next, I will provide brief definitions for the concepts of communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership skills. I will discuss these skills in further detail in Chapter 2.

Communication refers to an exchange of conversation between individuals. This exchange is a message transferred in the form of speech or symbols with a specific purpose in mind (Kurniadi & Mahaputra, 2021). Communication may be spoken, nonverbal, or written sharing of knowledge and experience, concepts, and thoughts between individuals and groups. (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Kurniadi & Mahaputra, 2021). Successful communication means that individuals and groups can effectively share their messages and ideas and achieve desired goals. The capacity, competence, or ability to effectively communicate information, ideas, and thoughts to others in a clear, succinct, and cohesive manner is referred to as a communication skill; examples are, the ability to explain, transfer meaning, exchange ideas, and the ability to convey messages. (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Coates, 2016; Darma & Supriyanto, 2017; Fahmi & Ali, 2022).

Motivation is said to be the heart of learning, meaning that it is a fundamental factor that helps in achieving goals successfully. Motivation is what drives people to learn. Motivation is a desire or drive, an intricate series of attitudes, values, and processes that guide individuals in achieving their goals. Motivation requires having a purpose and helps in finding directions towards achieving goals. (Rivai et al., 2017; Borah, 2021; Fahmi & Ali, 2022). Motivated people will work hard to achieve their aspirations. Motivation skills are the specific strategies and techniques that are used to enhance, maintain, and sustain motivation by a person. Examples of motivation skills are time management, goal setting, self-discipline, and self-motivation as well as many others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Elliot et al., 2017; Wille & Strode, 2017; Guzman & Guitering-Mansibang, 2022).

Initiative can be described as a trait that allows a person to make efforts actively and consciously in personal development. Cognitive and behavioural components are decision-making factors that allow a person to take initiative. Also, a person shows initiative when he or she displays a willingness to accept change and is involved in strategic planning without external pressure. (Sushchenko et al., 2021; Balqis et al., 2023; Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek et al., 2012, 2019). To put it simply, an act to begin a task without being asked or instructed to do so is referred to as initiative.

However, initiative skills refer to the ability and capacity to stay focused on a plan and execute a task, project, or goal successfully based on knowledge and experiences. (Choi et al., 2013; Nieto, 2017; Nayak, 2020).

Leadership involves using the necessary qualities and skills to support and run businesses and take initiatives to guide the organization by setting rules and principles that everyone, including members of the leadership, shares and follows. Leadership has a big impact on how well the institute and the people who work there are doing. Leaders make sure that they listen to their employees and that the organization they lead shares the same values and that people working in their organization are moving towards the same goals. By doing so, leadership ensures that the organization works well. (Podolny et al., 2004; Iannotta et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2021; Yi & Zulaikha, 2022). Put simply, according to the Oxford Dictionary, leadership means to guide and motivate people towards a collective goal or result (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). At the same time, leadership skills refer to the ability to develop unique and effective methods that enable leaders to perform their roles effectively to accomplish work (Sadq, 2019; Crane, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2022; Yi & Zulaikha, 2022).

Furthermore, the responsibility of higher education relies on the highly knowledge-driven and constant upkeep of the technical and practical skills of its students (Gracia, 2009; Ofori, 2020). There are a growing number of researchers who are arguing that resources of the university, curriculum, and other services provided to the students limit the amount of training that can be devoted to learning skills needed for employability (Bridgestock 2009; Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Chapman, 2012; Kinash et al., 2016; Smith & Trede, 2013). The capacities required to proactively explore the job market and effectively deal with the profession-building process, because of certain characteristics like long-lasting learning and versatility should play a major role in university programs. Higher Education Employability research conducted between 2014-2016 by Kinash et al. (2016) in Australia found that of 108 university staff, 60% believed that they did not have the time to think about employability solutions such as work experience and internship opportunities for the students. Furthermore, the staff agreed that if they had time, they would be able to help the students promote their working life competencies, and consequently their employability.

Research in Finland, however, has recently shown that higher education institutes are now equipping students with the soft skills education demanded by the labour market. Research by AARRESAARI (Career Services Network of Finnish Universities) published in 2018 lists the minimum soft skills required by employers in the Finnish market. For instance, when it came to soft skills such as negotiation, networking, cooperation, problem-solving, supervisory skills and thinking skills, the students' soft skills did improve but still did not attain the stipulated minimum requirement set by employers. During the past few years, the understanding of the importance of soft skills for employment has increased, as discussed at the start of

the chapter (Bennett et al., 1999; Bušelić & Aničić, 2019; Saito & Pham, 2019; Sarkar et al., 2020; Tight, 2021; El Messaoudi & Mrah, 2022). Recently a study was done in Finland to assess undergraduate students' soft skills under a project named KAPPAS (Ursin et al., 2021). Who states that 60 percent of the higher education students mentioned that their soft skills are at satisfactory or lower levels while the remaining 40 percent stated that the level of their soft skills is good or higher. 2402 students with bachelor's degrees at seven universities of applied sciences and eleven universities in Finland participated in this study. The soft skills in question were analytic reasoning and evaluation, problem-solving, writing effectiveness, and writing mechanics. The study suggests that based on the research findings, attention should already be paid to the learning of soft skills at lower educational levels and in learning environments outside school. (Ursin et al., 2021).

These two Finnish studies, AARRESAARI and the KAPPAS project, highlight that even though the employment of university graduates is very high, the minimum standards set for soft skills by employers have not yet been achieved fully. In the KAPPAS national study, the students from the University of Lapland (87%) were the most employed in Finland, with the average being 83%. Employability skills are therefore important because, first, they give more satisfaction to employers concerning employees' abilities (Suleman, 2018) and, second, employees with employability skills will retain their jobs longer (Paadi, 2014; Fajaryati et al., 2020).

My research work aspires to address the crucial need for the development and integration of the imperative soft skills that are required for survival and adequate success in the job market (Dean, 2017; Poláková et al., 2023). The key to this research is to recognize that certain skills are crucial in enhancing graduate employability. Students can learn soft skills through practice. I intend to create a course which will be based on a workshop design and in which students who participate will have an opportunity to learn soft skills through practice.

My exploration into finding ways to enhance employability super skills for students is not just an academic pursuit but a challenge to myself. It is an extension of my curiosity: which is a desire to question traditional approaches to teaching. I use curiosity to ask questions and show the students who take part in my research how to be curious in a practical manner.

My research came about through data collection based on a course that I designed and implemented. The course I designed was based on the facilitative workshop-based approach. I used reflection, feedback, and experiential learning methods at the core to enhance the employability super skills of the students. This course resulted in a design solution which can be considered as an innovation or an add-on to the research on soft skills and the further implementation of soft skills in the universities. My contribution to the research in this thesis will hopefully transform the educational experiences of the students in my university and elsewhere.

1.2 The Purpose of the Research and the Research Question

This research expects to answer the following research question:

> Can and in what extent students' super skills of employability (communication skills, motivation/initiative skills, and leadership skills) be enhanced by using feedback, reflection, and experiential learning workshops?

This monograph PhD study aims to establish how group dynamics, team building, and facilitation can benefit higher education graduate students in the super skills category, so that they will be able to improve their employability chances, as well as their integration in their working life in the future. Furthermore, the research aims to construct a research-based employability super skill model that can then be applied in higher education institutions. The objective of this research is to enhance employability super skills, specifically communication skills, motivation/initiative skills, and leadership skills, by using feedback, reflection, and experiential learning methods.

To design and teach a course that enhances super skills requires at first a clear understanding of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that I may possess. Ontological assumptions are objective realities that exist independent of human perception (Cresswell, 2014). To choose an appropriate research approach and interpret research findings meaningfully, it is crucial to understand ontological assumptions (Cresswell, 2014). Understanding my ontological presuppositions is crucial because they can affect the kinds of questions I ask, the methods I employ to gather and analyse data, and the conclusions I reach based on my findings.

Furthermore, epistemological assumptions mean that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and experience. They affect the research questions, approaches, and conclusions that researchers form. Understanding these assumptions helps to evaluate different research approaches and findings. Researchers, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), should be open about their epistemological presumptions and make sure that their research design and research questions are consistent. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This approach is used to obtain knowledge from something to be studied which, in my case, is studying how to enhance super skills in the students.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions are combined with educational design research (EDR) in this research. I have chosen to conduct research based on EDR as the methodology because EDR consists of iterative processes and helps in finding and addressing complex problems. It also provides frameworks and helps in figuring out practical solutions. My ontological assumption is, therefore, that there is an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Creswell, 2014), while my epistemological assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and experience (Creswell, 2014). In this research, a social constructivist approach is taken to ensure that the reality is socially and subjectively

constructed (Creswell, 2014). My socio-constructivist view, together with EDR, will allow me to design and develop educational interventions to enhance student employability super skills.

Social constructivism is a perspective that emphasizes the importance of social contexts (Scotland, 2012) such as interaction (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Cromby, 2022), processes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Berger & Luckmann, 2016; Laasch et al., 2022), languages (Gergen, 2022), and communication (Agopian, 2022) in shaping individuals' understanding of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Scotland, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Berger & Luckmann, 2016).

In short, my study aims to enhance the employability super skills of the students in the university setting. This study will explore the use of facilitation techniques in doing so. EDR as a methodology based on a socio-constructivist perspective will help in iteratively addressing complexities in enhancing the employability super skills of the students. The use of EDR should provide practical solutions in enhancing employability super skills, so it is aligned with the socio-constructivist views discussed here.

1.3 Introduction to Educational Design Research EDR

Educational Design Research (EDR) mainly focuses on research based on teaching and learning to improve both teaching and learning methods (Juuti & Lavonen, 2006; Vartiainen, 2014; Ratinen, 2016), the quality and impact of educational research, and communication and technology (McKenney & Reeves, 2013). EDR research can provide new, up-to-date, relevant and useful knowledge for teaching and learning (Säljö, 2003; Confrey, 2006; Vartiainen, 2014). EDR not only produces results such as educational products, processes, programs, and policies, but it can also be used to solve real-life problems and discover new knowledge and theories (McKenney & Reeves, 2013; Ratinen, 2016).

In the past three decades or so, researchers have realized that not everything done in a laboratory setting gives the best understanding of a real-life situation; therefore, there is growing support for finding solutions to problems by working and doing research at the same time in real-life situations (McKenney & Reeves, 2013), thus paving the way for design-based research. DBR originated in the works of Allan Collins (1992) and Ann Brown (1992). Brown argued that studies done in laboratories face challenges in integrating them into real-world classrooms. Collin argued that education should be a design science. Collin and Brown used the term *design experiment* as they started to focus on processes and repeating interventions in the context of real-world problems in learning processes (Collins et al., 2004; McKenney & Reeves, 2013; Vartiainen, 2014; Ratinen, 2016). Since 1992 many

educational researchers have used this DBR methodology to understand and explore research (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bielaczyc, 2013; Vartiainen, 2014). As a result, design research has shown significant results in improving learning processes (Penuel et al., 2011 & 2016; Vartiainen, 2014; Ratinen, 2016). DBR involves the process of designing, evaluation, and revision which can be repeated as many times as needed till the intended results have been achieved for developing a new theory (Plomp, 2013; Ratinen, 2016; Taskinen et al., 2019).

Design-based research is not defined by its methods but by the goals of those who pursue it. It is constituted within communities of practice that have certain characteristics of innovativeness, responsiveness to evidence, connectivity to basic science, and dedication to continual improvement (McKenney & Reeves, 2013). These characteristics of innovativeness, responsiveness and connectivity embody at least two main ideas that researchers have explored over the years: first what it is that a society needs, and then finding ways to meet such needs.

Edelson (2002) argues that design comes first before the process of evaluation-based research and/or development of theories begins. The harder the research topic or design is, the longer it takes to investigate, experiment, and repeat the process several times to come to a conclusion. Thus, it is safe to assume that in design-based research there is no boundary between design and research as both are essential parts and complete each other (Edelson, 2002; Barab & Squire, 2004; Vartiainen, 2014; Taskinen et al., 2019). By using design-based research, researchers can move forward not only by offering explanations of their research but can also offer a design intervention of learning and innovation (Barab & Kirshner, 2001; Amiel & Reeves, 2008; Vartiainen, 2014).

Goff and Getenet (2017) describe design-based research as follows:

1. Integrating literature and exploratory research to develop an initial theoretical framework for design,
2. Implementing this with careful evaluation of processes as well as products in two iterations, using the results of the study of the first iteration to refine the second iteration, and
3. Finally, the results of the second iteration to produce a new and improved theoretical framework for design ready for further research study are presented as the main outcome of the thesis.

Educational design research EDR, therefore, is the research, implementation, and development of solutions to practical and educational problems. With the help of EDR, new knowledge is acquired that can then be used by others. EDR helps in both defining and reaching goals. Additionally, the value of EDR is also seen in its ability to improve educational pedagogical models and practices (McKenney & Reeves, 2013). Thus, EDR is defined as:

> a genre of research in which the iterative development of solutions (e.g., educational products, processes, programs or policies) to practical and complex

educational problems provides the setting for scientific inquiry and yields new knowledge that can inform the work of others (McKenney & Reeves, 2013).

Like DBR, EDR has some defining characteristics (Reinking & Bradley, 2008; Gravemeijer & Cobb 2006; Wang & Hannafin, 2005; McKenney & Reeves, 2013; Gu & Xu 2022). Briefly, a few of the common characteristics of EDR are *pragmatic, grounded, interventionist, iterative, collaborative, adaptive* and *theory oriented* (McKenney & Reeves, 2013; McKenney & Reeves, 2019).

Pragmatism in the context of its use in EDR means that it is an approach that encourages the researchers to work practically on finding solutions and their usefulness when they design and develop new educational interventions or solutions (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019; McKenney & Reeves, 2021). EDR is also *grounded* in theory and provides factual results to navigate work in real-life situations. EDR is also used for *intervention* to deal with change in an educational context, and it is implemented repeatedly or *iteratively* until a solution is found. Furthermore, EDR is a process of *collaboration* as it happens between researchers and teachers in an educational context. EDR is *adaptive* as new research and findings can mean that there is a need for a new educational design. Lastly, although EDR is *practical*, it is also *theory-based* so anyone can use EDR with a better understanding to design and develop solutions to their problems. (McKenney & Reeves, 2013; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; McKenney & Reeves, 2021).

There are three phases of EDR: an analysis/orientation phase, a design/development phase, and an evaluation/retrospective phase (Figure 1). As EDR is an iterative process, therefore, these phases are to be repeated as needed. (Bell, 2004; McKenney & Reeves, 2013; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; McKenney & Reeves, 2021). The outcomes of the early stages of EDR will consist of analysing problems that need to be addressed at the first successful iteration. The findings of analysis, together with a new and clear problem statement as an outcome of the first iteration, then starts the refining phase of EDR: *i.e.,* the second iteration. This design work can last for a week or many years depending on the problem and iterations being conducted (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2019 & 2021).

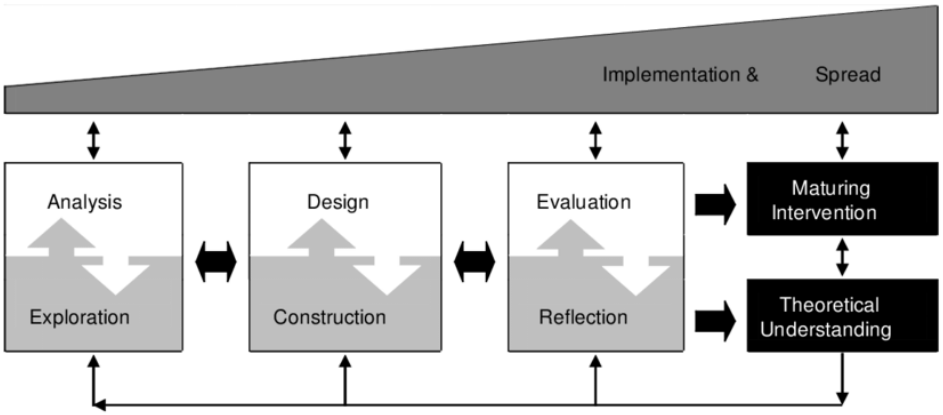


Figure 1 Basic Model of EDR by McKenney and Reeves (2014, p.135)

According to McKenney and Reeves (2012, 2013, 2014, 2019 & 2021), in EDR the principal researcher is responsible for the whole iterative process of planning, implementing, refining, and designing the framework of the research design study (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2019 & 2021). In the process of planning, the researcher him- or herself will continue to reflect and evaluate throughout the process. After planning each iteration, the implementation will occur in a real-life scenario (Kelly et al., 2014; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; Sloane & Kelly, 2014). It is recommended that EDR projects be done in chunks. The chunks which act as building blocks will eventually refine the knowledge and intervention at which the study is aiming. Finally, the role of the researcher is to answer the most important question of the research. Researchers must answer about the quality, success, and impact of their intervention, as well as new knowledge resulting from the study. (McKenney & Reeves, 2013; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; McKenney & Reeves, 2021).

In my research, I used and implemented the basic model of EDR by McKenney and Reeves (Figure 1) to understand in theory and practice the needs of students with regard to practising super skills via reflection, feedback, and experiential learning together with the three-step design research introduced by Goff and Getenet (2017). This study has applied EDR as a main methodological approach for two reasons. With EDR I can understand and refine a course to help facilitate students practicing super skills. Secondly, I will develop educational delivery (theory) and a model based on data from the designed course as described by Goff and Getenet (2017) and in the EDR process.

In the next section, I will discuss the concepts and definitions of graduate employability, models of graduate employability, and core skills of employability: reflection, feedback, and experiential learning. These concepts are discussed to create a course that uses EDR processes and is implemented in iterations to enhance the employability super skills of the students.

2 BUILDING THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF EDR

This chapter discusses employability and graduate employability, its definitions, and concepts. How the term has evolved since the late 1990s and its significance in the higher education context is discussed. This section also contributes to the literature in terms of a new definition of graduate employability. It also discusses models of employability that have been in use in educational institutes and that are connected to my research. There is a section on previous research in the field of graduate employability. Finally, this chapter discusses the super skills used to enhance the employability of the graduates.

2.1 Graduate Employability

The notion of employability has been surfacing from time to time, taking on different names over the past century and changing according to the needs of the work market (Sumanasiri, et al, 2015; Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Gazier, 2022). There are many ways to interpret the meaning of employability, especially graduate employability. However, first there is a need to differentiate the term "employability" from the similar and commonly used term "employment". Employability and employment are not interchangeable concepts as employability corresponds to capability and expertise in acquiring jobs, whereas employment simply refers to a job that has little to do with capabilities and expertise (Bourke et al., 1991; Knight & Yorke, 2004). The process of creating employability in the labour market requires that a graduate must create value actively for oneself to be employed (Korhonen et al., 2024). McQuaid et al. (2005) argue that "employability remains a contested concept in terms of its use in both theory and policy, and throughout the past century employability has been used as both a predominantly labour supply and a labour demand concept" (McQuaid et al., 2005). Given the continuing discussion concerning employability, a survey analysis has identified four potential stakeholders whose participation is crucial for the successful development and implementation of the concept of employability. These are students, graduates looking for employment, education centre staff, and potential employers (Kinash et al., 2015).

Employability is a combination of different elements including possession of the essential skill set to acquire employment, followed by the capacity, flexibility, and dexterity, age, experience, personal attributes, and labour market demands that is required to continue gaining employment (Hillage & Poolard, 1998; Sumanasiri, et al., 2015; Siivonen & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; McGrath et al., 2022; Korhonen et

al., 2024). Before I discuss graduate employability, it is necessary to understand how employability has been defined over the years.

2.1.1 Concepts and Definitions of Employability

The concept of employability has been defined as the relative capability of a person to secure a job because of individual circumstances and the job market (Canadian Labor Force Development Board, 1994, p. viii; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Then, in the late 1990s, being employed was linked to the lifelong acquisition of skills such as communication, being tech savvy, learning how to work on individual development, problem-solving, and team collaboration skills (Cole & Tibby, 2013; Hou et al., 2021). Later the term *employability* was defined as "an individual's ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if required and (ideally) secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work" (McGrath et al., 2010). In recent years employability has been defined as "the capacity to gain and retain formal employment or find new employment if necessary" (Hogan et al., 2013). Recently employability has been defined as "individuals' long-term abilities to work and remain employed" (Fleuren et al., 2020). The most recent definition of employability involves "one's skills set (both hard-skills and soft-skills) and the demand (defined by the market), which need to be matched" (Mezhoudi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the concept of employability was first discussed in a book by William Henry Beveridge, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* published in 1909. A detailed paper discusses the development of the notion of employability over time and gathers that it can be divided into seven different preliminary stages leading to the current concepts (Gazier, 1998 & 2017; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Gungea, 2019). These stages include:

1. Dichotomic employability: This refers to the identification and distinction of potential employees who possess the essential skillset for adequate fulfilment of job requirements from those who are incapable of doing justice to these tasks. This concept emerged early in the 20th century.
2. Socio-medical employability: This refers to any social, psychological, or physical impairments that negatively impact a candidate's suitability concerning a certain employment. This concept surfaced around the time of the Second World War.
3. Manpower policy employability: Emerging in the 1960s in America, this concept also refers to the incompetence of employees which may be due to a deficit in comprehension, background knowledge, expertise, or ethical values that makes them unfit for certain employers.
4. Flow employability: This concept came to the fore in the 1960s in France. It focuses on the requirement for employees in the job market to define the concept of employability.

5. Labour market performance employability: This concept developed internationally in the 1970s. It refers to the specified changes made to the policies and work strategies by the employers considering the quantifiable productivity of current employees.
6. Initiative employability: This developed in the late 1980s. It negated the idea of a single job and career pathway for one's entire life and proposed that individuals should be equipped with the essential skillset and aptitude enabling them to switch careers if needed.
7. Interactive employability: This concept takes multiple factors that affect the employability of a candidate into account. These factors include the expertise of competitors in the job market, the cultural outlook, socio-economic and financial policies, and employers' requirements for the expertise that an individual has to offer.

The seven stages above show that the concept of employability has been changing over time. This means that the employability concept is linked with the skills that employers demand of potential employees. In short, by the turn of the 20th century, employers hired workers who possessed essential skill sets to do the certain tasks. The skillset covered employability skills (both hard and soft skills). By the 1940s the suitability of candidates was measured by their social, psychological, and physical backgrounds. By the 1960s employers were looking at employees' background knowledge, their expertise in the field, and their ethical values before hiring them. By the 1970s employers were making polices and work strategies within their market to hire suitable candidates. In the 1980s the market moved towards allowing multiple careers if needed. Finally, in the 1990s, employers were looking at all the above-mentioned factors and many others before hiring a candidate. In short, these seven different stages highlight the important factors considered in the last century to hire candidates based on skills, expertise, market trends, background, social status, and corporate policies and strategies.

At the turn of the 21st century, the concept of employability revolved around labour supply and labour demand (McQuaid et al., 2005). However, most recently the concept of employability has encompassed *organizational strategies* where organizations provide necessary training and competencies to employees, *government policies (*which also include *social and economic policies)*, and *educational policies* where educational institutes play their part in providing support and knowledge to the students (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2013; Guilbert et al., 2016; Siivonen & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; Römgens et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Concepts and Definitions of Graduate Employability

While the concept of employability covers a wide range of skills and abilities that employers seek when hiring new employees, it is necessary to discuss the concepts of graduate employability as well. As I explore graduate employability, I will focus

on its concepts and definitions and discuss the needs associated with graduates and their employability.

Employability for a higher education graduate is about acquiring a job that requires skills and understanding of knowledge that a graduate has obtained through studies (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Pool & Sewell, 2007; Räty et al., 2019; Korhonen et al., 2024). To be properly employed means that a graduate holds a job that takes advantage of the capabilities of the said graduate (Korhonen et al., 2024). A graduate's employability is, therefore, the expertise that graduates need to succeed in workplaces provided by higher education institutes such as support for student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition, and identity (Knight & Yorke, 2004; Yorke, 2010; Yorke & Knight, 2006; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2013; Räty et al., 2019; Korhonen et al., 2024). Knight and Yorke (2004) suggest that learning and employability are interlinked closely and emphasize that graduate employability is a combination of achievements in four areas: understanding, skilful practices, efficacy beliefs and metacognition (knowledge of strategies to learn and think critically to support life-long learning).

The many concepts of graduate employability in the context of higher education rely on the acquisition of skills acquired by students and knowledge gained by students (Korhonen et al., 2024). However, it is also important to discuss several external and personal qualities that help graduates enhance their chances of employability. According to Tchibozo (2012), from graduation to employment, there are four concepts related to a graduate's employability. A person's family, gender and social background serve as strong factors; since certain opportunities might not be available to graduates, changes in the job market and the strategies employed by a person can also influence their employability (Tchibozo, 2012). Furthermore, distinct personal qualities in addition to a candidate's academic qualifications are known to have an impact on work performance (Harvey, 1999) and chances of being hired (Crebert et al., 2004). It has been suggested that self-management, teamwork, customer awareness, business awareness, problem-solving, communication, and IT application are skills that demonstrate innovation and creativity (Cole & Tibby, 2013; Jackson et al., 2020).

Now that I have discussed core concepts and key attributes linked with graduate employability, it is important to discuss how the definitions of graduate employability have been coined by researchers over the years. I will discuss how the definitions have evolved in the past couple of decades. Lastly, my focus will be on understanding the significance of graduate employability within the higher education landscape and coming up with a new definition based on the discussion and findings.

In 1998, graduate employability was defined as being able to get and keep fulfilling work and the capability to transition self-sufficiently within the market while keeping sustainable employment (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). In 1999, the Confederation of British Industry defined graduate employability as the possession

by a person of the characteristics and skills required to meet the changing needs of managers and clients (Bridgstock, 2009; National Union of Students, 2011). Bowden et al. (2000) broadened the idea of graduate employability by suggesting that the concept of employability is not restricted to the success of an individual in the job market, but it is also a matter of their preparedness to be able to contribute to the economy.

According to Hinchcliffe (2001), the Center for Employability (CfE) defined graduate employability as having a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make a person more likely to be secure and successful in their chosen occupation (Pool & Sewell, 2007). In 2002, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) defined the necessary skills for graduate employability as abilities required not merely to gain work, but also to advance within an organization to accomplish one's potential and contribute effectively towards the goals of the organization (Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2005; Bridgstock, 2009). Furthermore, the work based on the International Labour Organization (2002) in the Kirby report published in the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DoEET) discussed graduate employability as involving self-belief and an ability to get and keep a job, improve, change jobs if necessary, and learn how to get new job opportunities (Bridgstock, 2009). In 2002, a definition was suggested in research for the Northern Ireland Executive in which graduate employability was considered as the capability of an individual to enter and move around in the job market and be able to reach one's potential via accessible and sustainable employment. (DHFETE, 2002, p.7; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Knight and Yorke's (2003a) definition of graduate employability stipulate: "A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." Yorke (2010) defined graduate employability as a set of skills, individual characteristics and perspectives that increase the chances of a graduate to secure a job and have success in his/her respective field, thereby benefiting all participants in the economy (ESECT) (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018). Marock (2008) in discussing graduate employability, argued that it is the capacity and willingness of an individual to invest finance, time, and energy to train for the development of their skills depending upon the individual's expected return on that particular investment. The return mentioned here has two aspects: the expectation of increased financial prosperity, and a better standing in the job market. (Marock, 2008).

The definition of graduate employability by Kinash et al. (2015) saw significant changes in recent years 2015-2023, especially within the higher education context to obtain and retain a job (Lowden et al., 2011). In addition to skills (Tran, 2016), knowledge acquisition (Bridgestock & Jackson, 2019), and knowledge economy (Majid et al., 2019), the definition was amended to reflect the changing needs of

graduate employability (Al Asefer & Zainal Abidin, 2021) and the growing role of higher education institutes in preparing students for success in the job market. The emphasis on personal growth, adaptability to ever-changing market trends, and the ability to contribute to the knowledge economy (Pudyanti et al., 2022; García-Aracil et al., 2023) is stressed and is the focus of the current definitions. This trend is apparent because it is now not important just to secure a job; a worker must constantly work on self-development. The potential contributions of individuals to the betterment of society and the economy are also calculated before hiring decisions are made.

The New Definition of Graduate Employability

I have discussed various definitions of graduate employability starting from the year 1997. The definitions of graduate employability have evolved a great deal during this time. At first (1997-2002) the term was understood and centred around the concepts of acquiring skills and knowledge. These skills and knowledge are focused on lifelong learning, soft skills, adaptability, and the ability to progress in jobs, and in doing so to grow the economy. Subsequently, between 2003 and 2023, graduate employability, in addition to acquiring skills and knowledge, also meant having a positive attitude towards not only personal benefit but also benefiting society and the economy.

Considering how the meaning of graduate employability has changed over the years, I have created my own definition of graduate employability. I have done so by deriving key terms from the definitions between 1997-2023. These key terms are mentioned below:

- **Skills:** Mentioned consistently in various definitions.
- **Characteristics:** Implies personal attributes.
- **Attributes:** Refers to personal qualities.
- **Perspectives:** Reflects individual viewpoints.
- **Self-belief:** Highlighted as important.
- **Positive attitude:** Specifically mentioned in some definitions.
- **Personal development:** Indicates a focus on growth.
- **Communication:** Considered to be a key soft skill.
- **Adaptability:** Suggested as vital for graduates.

Graduate employability is now a combination of skills that include communication, adaptability, and attitude. Combining these with the knowledge that graduates possess over time and expertise from their field enables them to secure and move forward in their careers. In doing so, not only do individuals themselves benefit, but they also contribute to the economy. Here is the new definition of graduate employability that I have created based on my research on this term:

Graduate employability refers to a perspective of having a set of necessary soft skills, characteristics, and attributes such as effective communication skills, adaptability, self-belief, and a positive attitude, which, when combined with knowledge and

expertise, develop one's ability to secure and succeed in a job, contributing to both individual and broader economic growth.

In conclusion, in the higher education context, graduate employability is emerging and evolving to ensure that students have successful job acquirement and greater job satisfaction. There is a need to integrate these concepts into our education system and keep an eye on the changes in job requirements to prepare our graduates for the challenges of the ever-changing job market to allow better work placement. As the new definition stipulates, employability is not just about securing a job anymore it is now about continuous personal development and the ability to adapt to market trends and learn new skills, and an individual's contributions to the knowledge economy are also taken into consideration. This new definition in the context of higher education means that students, when leaving their institutes, can combine their soft skills, characteristics, and attitudes with knowledge and expertise to retain and thrive in their jobs and contribute to society and the knowledge economy.

2.2 Models of Graduate Employability

In the previous section, I discussed employability and graduate employability. In this section, I will discuss different models of graduate employability presented by researchers over the years. In these models the researchers have discussed the positions and roles Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) have played for the success of graduates in gaining employability. Furthermore, research shows that graduate employability is a topic of discussion among governments, universities, employers, and students (Bennett, 2019; Okolie et al., 2021; Rukmana et al., 2023). Many models have emerged over the years in this field of graduate employability. I will discuss some newer and more recent models that are based on foundational models of graduate employability. I will also discuss in this section two models that help researchers measure and evaluate graduate employability skills. This way I hope to discuss comprehensively the critical aspects of graduate employability in the context of HEIs and their graduates. I will start this discussion by referring to Hillage and Pollard's (1998) theoretical model on graduate employability.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) were essentially the first ones to provide a framework, albeit a theoretical one (Sumanasiri, et al, 2015), to discuss graduate employability. Hillage and Pollard (1998), through their prototype framework, formulated an acceptable definition of graduate employability. According to this prototype model, four key features constitute graduate employability, namely: assets, deployment, presentation, and contexts (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Dinh & Hiep, 2019; McGunagle & Zizka, 2020; Malhotra et al., 2022). Assets include "baseline, intermediate, and high-level". Deployment includes "Career management skills, job search skills, and strategic approach". Presentation includes "presentation of CVs,

qualifications both academic and vocational, references and testimonies, interview technique, and work experience or track record". Lastly, contexts include 'personal circumstances and external factors." Hillage and Pollard (1998) focused on the employability skills of individuals that consist of getting knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They suggested that these skills are transferable in different contexts and thus important for individuals to possess. Lastly, Hillage and Pollard's (1998) four factors and the connection between them depend on how well individuals can use them to market themselves to gain employability (See Hillage & Pollard, 1998). This model does not discuss these four factors' interrelationships to explore how external factors – support factors, employment policy factors, labour market factors, social, institutional, and economic factors (Herman, 2015; Cheng et al., 2022) – might influence individuals (graduates) and, in the process, can impact their employability.

One model which explores the factors that affect the employability of graduates was developed by Bennett et al. (1999) and is known as a model of course provision. This model focuses on developing generic skills in graduates (see Bušelić & Aničić, 2019; Tight, 2021; El Messaoudi & Mrah, 2022). This model strives to identify the different approaches adopted by facilitators to help improve the employability of future graduates.

Bennett et al., (1999) suggest that learning and teaching generic skills require effort from both students and educators. Their model consists of five elements: disciplinary content knowledge, disciplinary skills, workplace awareness, workplace experience, and generic skills (Bennett et al., 1999). Disciplinary content knowledge is "acquired through work experience or workplace simulation". Disciplinary skills are also referred to as core skills by Bennett et al., (1999) with varying definitions across disciplines. Workplace awareness aims to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic simulated environments. Lastly, workplace experience is deemed essential for developing work-related skills and understanding workplace culture. In the framework suggested by Bennett et al. (1999), students can be made aware of disciplinary content knowledge by first being equipped with the essential theoretical knowledge followed by exposure to the environment of potential workplaces to enable the implementation of their academic learning.

In short, the limitations of the two models discussed above are summarized as follows. The Hillage and Pollard (1998) model emphasizes individual factors like personal assets and presentation but fails to explore the interdependence of these factors and how they influence employability. Hillage and Pollard (1998) oversimplify employability by ignoring critical aspects such as social networks and systemic factors like discrimination and economic conditions. Bennett et al.'s (1999) model, on the other hand, presents a different perspective on the employability of graduates. Their model focuses on generic skills, but a potential limitation of the model is that it may not adequately account for the specific skills and knowledge required in different industry-specific skills or job roles. These limitations that

can complicate the employability of graduates are influenced by social networks, discrimination, industry-specific demands, and economic conditions, to name a few.

Moreover, discussing Hillage and Pollard's (1998) and Bennett et al.'s (1999) models make it clear that graduate employability is a diverse and complex concept. The employability of a graduate is influenced by different factors such as individual and contextual factors, as pointed out earlier in the discussion. The models provide valuable knowledge and insights but also are limited in some respects. I will discuss the USEM model next to address some of the limitations of the previous two models and, in the process, get a clearer understanding of graduate employability.

Pool and Sewell in 2007 introduced the USEM model building on the concept presented by Knight and Yorke (2004). USEM is an acronym for Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, and Metacognition (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Sumanasiri, et al., 2015; Nghia et al., 2023). Understanding (Pool & Sewell, 2007) refers to the knowledge of the selected discipline as well as knowledge of the operation of institutions. Skills (Pool & Sewell, 2007) entail expertise in academics, management, and general presentation. Efficacy beliefs (Pool & Sewell 2007) refer to the learner's self-belief, self-esteem, and self-reflection. They also encompass self-improvement and gradual development. Metacognition (Pool & Sewell, 2007) is the knowledge of efficacy and the capability of solving problems through thinking, learning, and implementing different solutions.

One shortcoming of USEM is that it fails to provide a clear-cut definition of employability, as this model was proposed for those (researchers/students) who are already well acquainted with the field. Therefore, in 2007, Pool and Sewell also introduced the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability, which stresses ensuring that students can develop crucial skills of self-dependence and self-confidence while gaining experience from potential work environments (Sumanasiri, et al., 2015; Nghia et al., 2023). "The key to Employability/CareerEDGE" model provides information about what needs to be done, considered, and included. In my opinion, it is an important tool for knowledge transfer. Finally, this model can also be adapted to other situations outside of the university context (Pool & Sewell 2007; Sumanasiri, et al., 2015; Nghia et al., 2023).

Acquiring employability requires skills and individual development in various fields of life. The CareerEDGE model's reflection and evaluation of the five elements of the Pool and Sewell 2007 model (Figure 2) explains how numerous factors affect the probability of gaining employability. According to Pool and Sewell (2007), lacking any of the five basic components can reduce one's chances of getting a job. The key to successful employment is experience, degree subject, career, generic skills, and emotional intelligence (feelings and thoughts). With reflection and evaluation next, a person may achieve self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Reaching this stage, according to the Pool and Sewell (2007) model, the candidate is ready to be employed (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

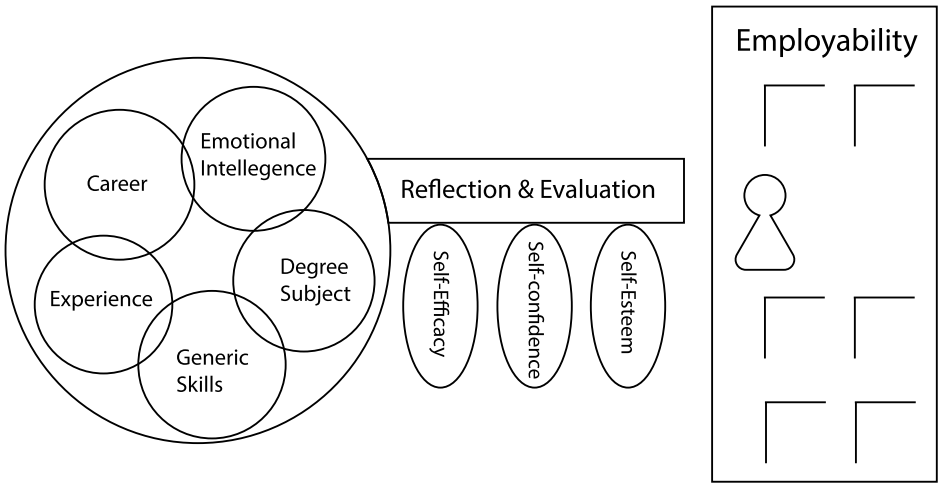


Figure 2 CareerEDGE: Key to Employability by Poll and Sewell 2007

Furthermore, if a person can organize and successfully execute an action plan on his/her own in any situation, it is called self-efficacy. In a nutshell, self-efficacy is achieved through reflection and the evaluation of experiences (Pool & Sewell, 2007). This also means that a person can motivate him- or herself and act accordingly (Bandura, 1995). Bandura "...stated that a major goal of formal education (provided by universities) should be to equip students with the intellectual tools like efficacy beliefs and intrinsic interests to educate them (the students) throughout their lifetime" (Bandura, 1995). Researchers have urged universities to claim social responsibility as educational institutes to improve the employability of graduates. The university must be a link between the academic training that promotes students' employability and the skills training that the business world demands from them; that is, it must equip them with the necessary soft skills to enhance employability (Stephen & Festus, 2022).

If self-efficacy is on the inside of a person, then self-confidence is what is projected onto the outside world (an external factor). Students can increase their self-confidence by making complete use of the direct relation between self-efficacy and self-confidence (Pool & Sewell, 2007). There are two types of self-esteem: global and specific. Global esteem refers to a generalized feeling of self-worth and confidence, whereas specific self-esteem refers to a feeling of self-worth and confidence about a specific activity and behaviour. Furthermore, graduates' level of achievement is influenced by how they feel about themselves (Lawrence, 2017). This means that the more positive feedback teachers give the students, the more self-esteem the students will be able to gain.

In short, self-efficacy is the ability to organize and execute an action plan on one's own and is achieved through Bandura's (1995) three sources of efficacy: mastery

experiences, learning from others, and social persuasion. One way to achieve self-efficacy is to use reflection and evaluation methods. Self-confidence is the projection of self-efficacy onto the outside world. Positive feedback from educators can increase both self-efficacy and self-esteem, which can have a positive impact on a graduate's level of achievement.

The model proposed by Pool and Sewell (2007) does not offer a perfect framework of employability either. Following this model does not guarantee success for a student in the practical world. However, it is a repetitive process ensuring sufficient exposure to a student to prepare him or her to face new challenges in the ever-changing world (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Furthermore, Pool and Sewell's (2007) USEM model and CareerEDGE model address some of the limitations of Hillage and Pollard's and Bennett et al's models by emphasizing the importance of understanding, skills, self-efficacy, and metacognition in employability. However, the USEM model lacks a clear definition of employability, while the CareerEDGE model focuses on developing self-dependence and self-confidence without addressing systemic factors that can impact employability: factors such as discrimination based on attitude, needs-based education, support, race, gender, economic growth, education, training opportunities, governmental policies, access to resources, and lack of networks (Blustein et al., 2013; Montesanti & Thurston, 2015; Alhaqan et al., 2021; Baker, 2023). Job seekers often have no control over these factors which can impact securing jobs or maintaining jobs. Despite the challenges that the CareerEDGE model has, it is still considered an accepted model by researchers (Sumanasiri, et al., 2015).

These models address many of the needs associated with graduate employability. However, from the point of view of my research, these models are incomplete. Hillage and Pollard's (1998) model lacks interconnectedness, and the model simplifies employability, as discussed earlier, whereas Bennet et al. focus on generic skills and lack a comprehensive definition of graduate employability. While the USEM model also does not provide a clear-cut definition of graduate employability, it details the factors that influence graduate employability. Lastly, the CareerEDGE model, which also does not provide a definition, provides students with a practical way of achieving employability. The model offers information to students and advises them on what they need to do and consider enhancing their employability skills. The USEM and CareerEDGE models have some limitations that still need to be considered. First, these models do not provide a proper definition of graduate employability. Second, they do not discuss systemic factors.

The models I have discussed so far, collectively, offer graduates a comprehensive view of their graduate employability, starting with skills and moving on to self-belief, self-awareness, and metacognition. These models promote reflection, develop self-efficacy in students, and increase their self-confidence. Graduate employability is positively impacted due to these models as they help students gain employability skills. However, limitations like external factors and their impact on individuals

in different contexts still need to be considered in future research as I focus only on enhancing soft skills in this research. Future research can focus on limitations like systemic factors. Nevertheless, these models are important, and they should be considered as a part of newer frameworks being developed to enhance graduate employability. I see these models not as a solution but as a starting point or a base upon which to build my knowledge. Next, there are a few recent models that are having an impact on graduate employability. These models discuss different aspects that can enhance employability of a graduate. As I focus on soft skills, therefore, I discuss the parts of models that are relevant to my thesis topic. A few noteworthy ones are:

Trilling and Fadel's (2009) 21st Century Skills Framework emphasizes the importance of skills such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration for employability. It suggests that these skills are essential for success in today's rapidly changing and connected global economy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The CBI and Universities UK (2009) framework underlines the significance of a different approach to education and equipping candidates with soft skills like communication, teamwork, business and customer awareness, real-life problem-solving, the application of numeracy, demonstration of relative innovation, creativity, coordination, and intellectual risk-taking. Furthermore, Bridgstock's (2009) employability model highlights the importance and effects of career as well as self-management. The model emphasizes that knowing career and self-management skills is part and parcel of employability as they help ascertain to what extent the application of core skills will be useful (Cole & Tibby, 2013).

Harvey (2010) introduced the "Magic Bullet" model to explain the effects of higher education on scoring a job, along with the individual and institutional characteristics that strongly impact the employability of a graduate (Sin & Neave, 2016). Furthermore, the Magic Bullet model discusses "the important role of universities in the marketability of graduates, who receive all their relevant knowledge, skills, and experience from universities to find jobs (Bikar et al., 2023)."

Another framework (Figure 3) is given by Cole and Tibby (2013). This is an extensive, step-by-step framework to help make higher education institutions capable of equipping their graduates with the essential soft skills that improve employability. Cole and Tibby's model starts with the goal in the centre. Once the goal is set in the first stage of discussion and reflection, the second stage of review and mapping begins: What are we doing/not doing? Stage 3 is action/implementation, including strategies about sharing, learning (experiential learning), and finding gaps in the work done. Lastly, the focus of Stage 4 is evaluation to be able to say that the goal has been achieved/not achieved and how to go further.

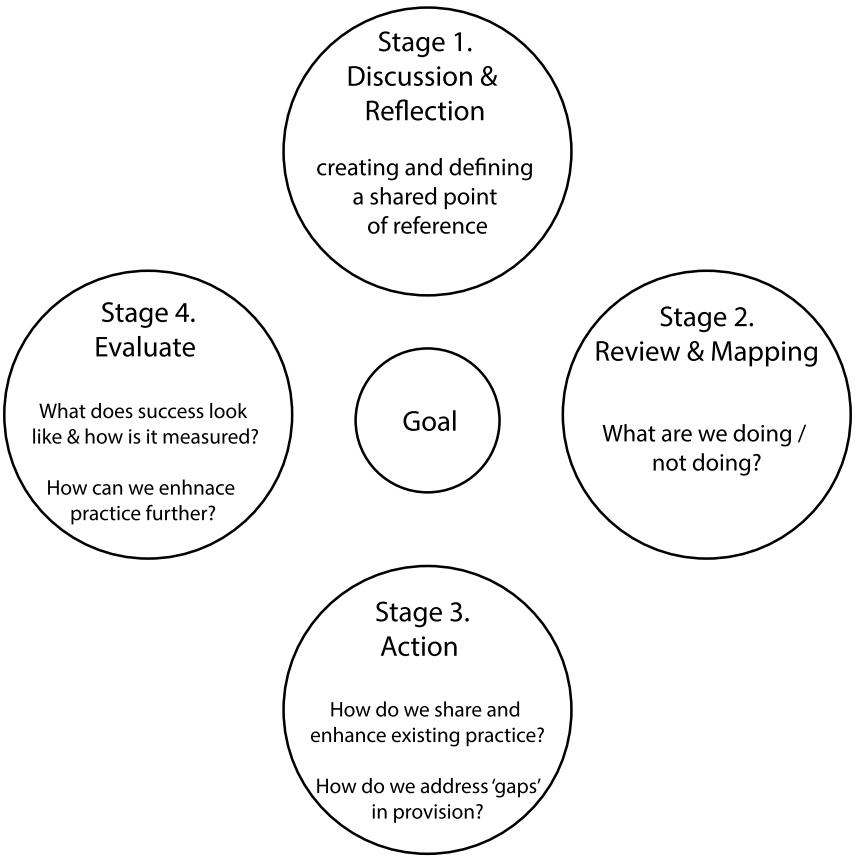


Figure 3 Cole and Tibby's (2013) Model

The last model I will discuss here is the graduate employability capital model by Tomlinson (2017) which I discuss here. Tomlinson's focus is more on the use of different resources and qualities for graduate employability and is not solely based on skills. These resources and qualities include technical and career skills (human), networking for human capital development (social), culturally acquired values and knowledge (cultural), how individuals define and reflect upon themselves in line with career goals (identity), and adaptability and resilience for career challenges (psychological). The graduate employability capital model focuses on the use of abilities, resources, and qualities by a graduate (See Nghia et al., 2023). I discuss this model to point out that graduates are expected to showcase their strengths in both soft skills and hard skills. This is not an easy task for a graduate. Therefore, if I can enhance their soft skills during the university education, it will be easier for them to show potential employers that they have developed soft skills alongside hard skills and are capable professionals.

Trilling and Fadel's (2009) framework, the CBI framework (2009), and Bridgstock's (2009) employability model discuss the importance of skills creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, as well as soft skills and self-management skills. Cole and Tibby's (2013) framework is a step-by-step approach to help higher education institutions equip their graduates with essential soft skills that improve employability, whereas Harvey's (2010) "magic bullet" model, the Employability Skills Scale (Misra & Mishra, 2011), and the Measurement Model of Employability Skills (Yusof et al., 2012) introduce various ways to assess and analyse the characteristics of candidates applying for jobs. At the same time, Tomlinson's (2017) model focuses on broader perspectives than skills. It considers abilities, resources, and qualities to help enhance the employability of a graduate.

The models I have discussed continue to show some similar limitations, such as a lack of focus on systemic factors. Lastly, it seems difficult, after discussing these models, to know how to measure employability skills, especially soft skills in practice. Thus, to be able to quantitatively measure soft skills is what I need to discuss next.

An "Employability Skills Scale" was devised in 2011 to test and analyse the professional attributes of candidates applying for jobs in the business sector (Misra & Mishra, 2011). Similarly, in 2012, the "Measurement Model of Employability Skills" was developed using multiple previous studies to assess the quality of a student's employability based on the presence or absence of core specified skills (Yusof et al., 2012).

These new models, frameworks, and measuring tools provide additional value by focusing on the importance of soft skills and providing tools for assessment and evaluation that universities can use to train students. These scales and tools can help employers see visually that students have practised soft skills in their university studies, thus enhancing their chances of employability.

2.3 Core skills of Graduate Employability in this Research

2.3.1 Graduate Employability Skills in General

Employability skills are the skills that are very relevant to acquiring and keeping work and are the abilities of an employee that make the employer's hiring decisions easy (Harvey, 2001; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Sumanasiri, et al, 2015; Subramanian, 2017; Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Furthermore, employers want their employees' employability skills to be present in addition to the knowledge and technical understanding in the subject or field for which employees are applying (Subramanian, 2017). Attaining employability skills is important because some Fortune 500 CEOs, researchers at Stanford Research Institute and Carnegie Mellon Foundation have found that long-term job success depends mainly on people skills, not technical skills (Rao, 2010).

Employability skills are the personal traits, attributes, or level of dedication

a person possesses that sets him/her apart from other candidates who may have comparable skills and expertise. These skills are reflection, evaluation and decision-making, interpersonal and communication skills, skills in working with teams, time-management skills, self-management skills, adaptability to situations (open-mindedness, acceptance, and the ability to listen), ability to follow instructions, ability to take initiative, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, and customer service, knowledge of the business, knowledge competencies, Literacy and numeracy relevant to the position, and ICT knowledge, among many more. (Bridgstock, 2009; Kumar & Kumar, 2016; Subramanian, 2017; Ornellas et al., 2019; Rakowska & de Juana-Espinosa, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2023; Riviezzo et al., 2023). Before moving ahead, I must mention that the demand of soft skills by employers change according to the market demands, therefore, skills that are needed today might differ tomorrow. This thesis discusses four soft skills only, but the focus is on the process of learning by doing. Hence, the soft skills might differ later due to market demand, but the process of learning these types of skills will probably have similar features.

These employability skills are a combination of general skills, and job-specific skills; therefore, Subramanian (2017) suggests dividing these employability skills into three broader categories: applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills. Applied knowledge covers skills that integrate the academic knowledge and technical skills of an employee who then uses his or her skills to put them to use in the workplace. The ability to build a working and productive relationship using interpersonal skills to connect with clients, co-workers, and superiors' leadership comes under the effective leadership category. Workplace skills refer to analytical and administrative skills, as well as employees showing an ability to complete tasks at work by taking initiative and showing problem-solving skills. (Subramanian, 2017).

Researchers are divided on the question of whether these career employability skills can be taught to the students. Some researchers have found evidence showing that better graduate employment outcomes and career success come from teaching these employability skills (Turban & Cable, 2003), but some researchers disagree (Knight & Yorke, 2003a; Green et al., 2009). Furthermore, research has also found that with education, students achieve high levels of inspiration and career self-efficacy that result in better school-to-work transition (Evans & Burck, 1992; Pinquart et al., 2003; Bridgstock, 2009; Subramanian, 2017). Research found students who have a positive attitude and understanding of their abilities possessed higher levels of employability as compared to others (Eby et al., 2003; Bridgstock, 2009). This coincides with a study on employability skills perceptions of students that concluded that students with work experience had a better understanding of the employability skills needed; the study concluded that they would need to practise their employability skills before getting into the workplace (Subramanian, 2017). Lastly, I want to make it clear that learning or teaching employability skills in higher education does not mean that learning employability skills automatically lead

to employment. Learning employability skills and adding them to the curriculum means that higher education gives graduates the capacity to develop their competencies for lifelong learning (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020) and a higher chance of employment.

Universities currently need to reflect on strengthening their employability skills programs and play a vital role in providing skills for the ever-changing job market by providing training which can improve, maintain, and develop the employability of their graduates (Guilbert et al., 2016; Ornellas et al., 2019; Ornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020).

Now I will discuss core soft skills studied in my thesis. I set out to research and recognize certain soft skills that are important in enhancing graduate employability skills. Employability skills consist of soft and hard skills, but I focus on soft skills. In a study by Kinash and Crane (2016), twenty employers were asked what skills they needed to see in candidates that would lead them to hire the candidates on the spot. Fifteen skills were discussed and ranked based on the employers' replies. The top four skills prioritized by the employers were soft skills: communication skills with 75%, motivation and initiative skills with 55%, and leadership skills with 50%. Due to these four soft skills being at the top of the employers' list, Kinash and Crane (2016) named these four skills as super skills. I decided to study the four super skills named by Kiansh and Crane (2016), which I will now discuss.

2.3.2 Communication Skills

In section 1.1 I differentiated between communication and communication skills. Here I will discuss the differences in more detail. Iksan et al. (2012) have defined communication as sharing and defining the meaning of the ideas exchanged through symbolic means. Communication begins when information is dispatched from the sender (writer, speaker) to the receiver (reader, listener) via any means (instrument or otherwise) and is given feedback by the receiver, who encodes and interprets the information (Murray, 1988; Pettersson, 2002; Velentzas & Broni, 2014). Researchers define communication variously as a non-verbal skill, as providing feedback, as putting forth notions in written or verbal form, as presenting and discussing ideas for the achievement of a specific goal or to reach a consensus (Baharom & Palaniandy, 2013; Ab Rahman et al., 2019; Panadero & Lipnevich, 2022). Thus, the major elements of communication are the sender, receiver, information channel, and feedback. All these elements help create a process. Communication is divided into three types: public communication (speeches), interpersonal communication (between two or more individuals), and management communication (group communication) (Iksan et al., 2012).

There are several kinds of communication and the ones that are closely related to this study are discussed next: verbal and non-verbal methods of communication. Verbal communication is a two-way communication channel that involves the

exchange of information, ideas, and opinions between people (Iksan et al., 2012). It can be oral or written in nature. Oral communication is a type of verbal communication which involves an exchange of information by word of mouth or speaking. Since humans spend 75% of their time communicating orally (Morreale et al., 2000; Kholmamatovna, 2023), it is an important skill to practise. Written communication is the type of communication that makes use of written words to interact. It is considered one of the most important skills to have for academic and professional success (Sparks et al., 2014; Ahmed, 2023). Non-verbal communication, on the other hand, has been defined by Seiler and Beall (2005) as an exchange of ideas, information, or opinions through symbolic means (Iksan et al., 2012). When broken down, almost 55% of the communication in our daily lives is non-verbal (Bunglowala & Bunglowala, 2015). It includes gestures, touch, expressions, postures, and tone of voice (Abercrombie, 1972; Lawrence, 2017).

However, as explained earlier, this focuses on understanding and enhancing the super skills of graduates and finding ways in which graduates can enhance their communication skills. Communication skills were defined earlier in section 1.1 as the capacity, competence, or ability to effectively communicate information, ideas, and thoughts to others in a clear, succinct, and cohesive manner. Communication skills include the ability to explain, transfer meaning, exchange of ideas, and ability to convey messages (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014; Coates, 2016; Darma & Supriyanto, 2017; Fahmi & Ali, 2022).

Research has shown that training can improve the communication skills of students (Krause et al., 2017). Although communication skills are identified as being vital for obtaining and keeping jobs, students still tend to underestimate how important these skills are to their professional careers (Ab Rahman et al., 2019; Kleckner & Butz, 2022). Having good communication skills can help with job interviews (Jamil et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2022). Furthermore, research has shown that "Communication skills, including the ability to problem solve, work in teams, and adapt to various audiences, are critical in today's workplace" (Ab Rahman et al., 2019). Some of the communication skills that employers seek are oral and written communication skills, listening skills, interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, and presentation skills (Barkley et al., 2014; Ab Rahman et al., 2019; Baird & Parayitam, 2019; Ansari, 2021).

The discussion and research on communication skills needed in higher education is not new. I have mentioned a few of the older studies (Table 1) on communication skills to show that the importance of communication skills has been stressed for many years in higher education.

Table 1 Emphasis on Communication Skills Over Time: A Chronological Overview

Study	Skills stressed	Additional Insights
Curtis (1988).	Oral Communication, Written Communication, Listening Skills	Most valued skills in entry-level jobs
Kim & Wright (1989).	Communication Skills	Identified as important competency for a successful career
Carnevale (1990).	Oral Communication, Listening Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Negotiation Skills, Group Effectiveness Skills, Teamwork	Detailed knowledge of 16 essential skills
Ugbah & Evuleocha (1992).	Communication	Essential factor influencing graduates' job interviews
Peterson (1997).	Paramount role of communication skills for a successful career	Many applicants lack competent communication skills in interviews
Morreale et al., (2000).	Importance of communication in job prospects	Expressing oneself appropriately in an interview is crucial
Cleland et al., (2005).	Constructive communication environment	Need for students to become proficient in communication skills
Ihmeideh et al., (2010).	Constructive communication environment	Importance of students becoming proficient in communication skills
Simmenroth-Nayda et al., (2012).	Improved communication capability after a communication course	Significant improvement in history-taking ability

The stress on the needs for students to learn communication skills is evident in Table 1. However, the most recent studies on communication skills in the context of higher education will be mentioned next to find out if communication skills are still considered to be as important as they were in the past.

A quantitative study done in higher education in 2022 still stresses the importance of teaching communication skills to students (Kiong et al., 2022). Kiong et al. (2022) report that teachers find it difficult to teach communication skills. They set out to find out the problems faced during the implementation of communication skills learning, knowledge of learning style patterns and communication skills, and the need to develop communication skills based on the learning style module. The study findings state that communication skills are important and there is a need for teaching effective communication skills in higher education to ensure student success in the job market.

For students, one effective way in which communication skills can be improved is through practice (Kerr et al., 2021). This practice can be helpful for their careers as they can then demonstrate to their employers their communication skills during job interviews. One study found that incorporating communication-focused assignments, such as group projects and presentations, into course curricula

improved students' communication skills (Barkley et al., 2014). Additionally, providing opportunities for students to practise and receive feedback on their communication skills, such as through peer review or coaching sessions, can also lead to improvement (Kerr et al., 2021; Pedersen et al., 2021).

All these studies on communication skills show that communication skills are still essential skills that employers seek in potential employees. To summarize briefly, this section has discussed the differences between communication and communication skills. The discussion on verbal and non-verbal ways of communication helps us understand the significance of communication in general and communication skills in particular in daily life as well as in work life. With the help of recent studies and some past studies, this section has explored the need for different communication skills in HEIs. Next, I will discuss motivation and initiative skills in the context of higher education and employability skills needs.

2.3.3 Motivation Skills

Motivation is the driving force that pushes an individual towards achieving their goals (Rivai et al., 2017; Borah, 2021; Fahmi & Ali, 2022). The motivation of an individual is based on how certain behaviours can lead to certain outcomes; hence, the study of motivation is based on "event conditions" which empower and direct behaviour. Any event that can empower or direct behaviour is said to be motivational. Motivation is the driver of direction, control, and perseverance in human behaviour, which means that motivation strengthens one's behaviour, guides or directs the behaviour, and maintains or enhances such behaviour (Tohidi & Tarokh, 2006b; Borah, 2021). Thus, motivation can be defined as "an inspiration that propels someone into an action" (Borah, 2021), whereas motivation skills are the specific strategies and techniques that are used to enhance, maintain, and sustain motivation by a person (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Elliot et al., 2017; Wille & Strode, 2017; Guzman & Guitering-Mansibang, 2022).

Motivation skills as employability super skills for individuals consist of two aspects: first, understanding what motivates individuals and exhibiting motivation to potential employers, and second, learning to set goals and achieve them. Motivation skills are the ability to maintain or sustain motivation; therefore, these abilities are used by self-driven, dedicated, and committed students to achieve tasks and goals. When students understand their source of motivation and find ways to present their skills to employers, they will come one step closer to gaining employability. Lastly, for motivation skills enhancement and ways to present their motivation skills to employers, students need to work on their goal setting and feedback delivery (Rahiem, 2021). This means that if a person is setting their own goals and is actively engaged in conversations and providing constructive feedback to teammates, this will show the employers that the person is motivated and requires less support in work-related activities.

There are motivation theories which suggest tools to motivate humans (Agarwal, 2019). Agarwal (2019) mentions Equity theory, Reinforcement theory, Expectancy theory, Goal-setting theory, Needs Theories including Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth Theory (ERG) theory, McClelland's trichotomy of needs theory, and Herzberg's two-factor theory (See Agarwal, 2019). These theories have been to use in academia.

The role of higher education in teaching motivation skills will be discussed next. Universities have focused on goal setting, feedback, rewards, and task interest to improve motivation skills in students (Rahiem, 2021), using these above-mentioned theories and tools. Elliot et al. (2017) also found in his research that when universities focus on goal setting and feedback enhancement motivation skills, this results in better academic performance and self-esteem of the students.

Motivation skill is one of the most valued skills from an employer's perspective, as well (Kinash & Crane, 2016). Employers value motivation skills because these skills enhance the individual's ability to achieve goals, work with dedication, and maintain commitment to their tasks. Moreover, Kamalian et al. (2010) suggest that a motivated employee will have his/her goals in line with those of the company. Furthermore, Dobre (2013) says that a motivated person will work for the company instead of against the company and will constantly aspire to improve his/her work (Dobre, 2013). Research also backs up the suggestion that motivated employees tend to find better ways to execute their tasks (see Sabir, 2017). Three studies in the past two decades show that motivation was and still is deemed a necessary skill to have for gaining employability. In a study by Maes et al. (1997), 354 managers took part and ranked competencies related to motivation skills that graduates needed to attain entry-level positions. In another study, the findings revealed self-motivation as one of the top three competencies required for attaining a job (Morreale et al., 2000). Similarly, I have discussed Kinash & Crane's (2016) study in which employers consider motivation skills the second most important skill for job seekers to have.

Motivation and motivation skills are understood as important aspects of individuals' goal achievements. Now that it is clear what motivates individuals and what kind of skills are needed to do so, it is time to transition to another skill that is closely related to motivation skills: initiative skills. I will discuss what is meant by initiative and initiative skills, the connection between motivation skills and initiative skills, and why initiative is naturally connected with motivation skills.

2.3.4 Initiative Skills

Initiative is one of the elements of motivation (Goleman, 1998). Motivation without initiative would be tantamount to nothing as one may be driven to do something, but the fear of the unknown may stop him/her from acting (Goleman, 1998). According to Fay & Frese (2001), initiative is about starting work without being told; it involves coming up with goals on your own and being persistent in accomplishing tasks.

Initiative is an act to begin a task without being asked or instructed (Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek et al., 2012 & 2019; Sushchenko et al., 2021; Balqis et al., 2023). Thus, at its core, initiative means to independently take charge and take advantage of situations when they occur instead of waiting for instructions from leadership. It means being proactive during job operations as an individual. Furthermore, initiative is defined in the Oxford Dictionary in three ways. The first definition is "the ability to assess and initiate things independently." Initiative is also defined as "the power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do." Thirdly, it is defined as "an act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation; a fresh approach to something". It has also been defined as "doing the right thing without being told" (Elbert Hubbard Quotes: Brainy Quotes).

On the other hand, initiative skills, for individuals at work, are abilities that support being proactive, coming up with creative solutions on their own, learning on the go, being confident, and scoping out new opportunities while at work. Simply put, initiative skills play an important role in professional success (Stephen & Festus, 2022). Initiative skill, therefore, refers to the ability and capacity to stay focused on a plan and execute a task, project, or goal successfully based on knowledge and experience (Choi et al., 2013; Nieto, 2017; Nayak, 2020) with little to no help or guidance from the leadership.

Stephen & Festus (2022) found that initiative skills are highly valued by employers and are essential for employability. Employers want to see initiative skills in potential employees because possessing these skills means that a person is more likely to take on difficult tasks, seek out new ways and opportunities for his/her and the company's success, and demonstrate a proactive attitude in general towards work (Kinash & Crane, 2016; Rawlings, 2016; Stephen & Festus, 2022). Initiative skills are important for employers because prospective employees can use them to show that they can think for themselves. These skills also prove that employees can and will grow tremendously well compared to others. Initiative skills help employees stay ahead of the competition by making them proactive (Rawlings, 2016; Stephen & Festus, 2022). Employers prefer such employees because they save them time and energy and they can get more out of them. Initiative skills show potential, and that potential translates to better opportunities for employees and more profitability for employers (Rawlings, 2016; Ben Youssef et al., 2022; Stephen & Festus, 2022).

Similarly, university research shows that initiative skills play a significant role in the success of students in academia (Marques & Albuquerque, 2012). Research also shows that initiative skills enhance students' academic performance and their engagement in university courses (Fallows & Steven, 2000; Ben Youssef et al., 2022). Furthermore, when students take initiative, they also are likely to take on leadership roles, participate in discussions while working on projects, and engage in all sorts of group activities. Initiative skills were also found to be connected to

students' adaptability and resilience (Naidoo et al., 2022). According to this study adaptability and resilience are important for academic success.

In conclusion, motivation skills, defined as specific strategies and techniques that are used to enhance and maintain or sustain motivation, are important for individuals to reach their desired goals and outcomes. Initiative skills, defined as the ability and capacity to stay focused on a plan and execute a task, project, or goal successfully based on knowledge and experience, are closely linked to and built on the foundations of motivation. Together these two skills help individuals to independently initiate tasks, solve problems, and actively engage with opportunities that come their way. Initiative is considered one of the elements of motivation (Goleman, 1998), and individuals who display initiative skills are likely doing so due to their intrinsic motivation (Borah, 2021). Initiative and motivation skills help individuals act without constant supervision. Due to the connection between these two skills, there is evidence that initiative skills rely on the motivational drive of individuals because individuals with these two skills can work independently, assess the situation at hand, and need little to no supervision or instructions in completing tasks (Fay & Frese, 2001). Furthermore, studies have shown that initiative skills contribute to both the academic and professional success of the individuals (Marques & Albuquerque, 2012; Stephen & Festus, 2022), which highlights the connection between motivation and initiative skills. Due to the interconnectedness between these motivation and initiative skills, a connection is formed where motivation supplies the necessary fuel needed for a person to take initiatives to be active and work independently on tasks.

2.3.5 Leadership Skills

The fourth employability super skill is leadership. Leadership is a process in which organization heads utilize their knowledge and skills in a way to influence and direct employees in a particular direction which is in line with the goals of the organization (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015; Alblooshi et al., 2021; Bhatti et al., 2022). Leaders make sure that they listen to their employees, that the organization they lead shares the same values, and that the people working in these organizations are moving towards the same goals (Podolny et al., 2004; Iannotta et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2021; Yi & Zulaikha, 2022). Leadership is a power one possesses to bring about change in principles, beliefs, and attitudes in the organizations for which they work (Podolny et al., 2004; Ganta & Manukonda, 2014; Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015; Farahnak et al., 2020; Iannotta et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2021; Yi & Zulaikha, 2022; Walk, 2023). Thus, the techniques applied by leaders to influence change for the advancement of the group towards a common goal are leadership skills (Yousem & Beauchamp, 2007; Bryman, 2011; Riwo-Abudho et al., 2012; Ganta & Manukonda, 2014; Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015; Mansaray, 2019; Farahnak et al., 2020; Walk, 2023). Leadership skill, therefore, refers to the ability to develop unique and effective methods that

enable a leader to perform their roles effectively to accomplish work (Sadq, 2019; Crane, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2022; Yi & Zulaikha, 2022). Leadership skills can be learned through training, education, and individual and shared experiences (McCall Jr, 2004; Zou et al., 2015; Abbas et al., 2020; Abdulla et al., 2023; Wu & Parks, 2023).

To further explore leadership skills, it is important to understand that leadership is not only about abilities and techniques; it is also about having skills or attributes like vision, trust, and consistency. All these skills and attributes create trust in the abilities of all people involved (employees) and allow leaders to further guide their employees towards their common goals. Next, I will discuss other abilities and attributes that enhance leadership skills.

A leader possessing strong leadership skills should also embody certain attributes like vision, trust, drive, and consistency to establish trust among employees (Gara & La Porte, 2020; Montminy, 2022; Mukhwana & Levasseur, 2023). People with leadership skills have the power to guide and influence employees to seek change (through curiosity: asking questions) and utilize their talents to achieve specific goals (Hermosura, 2022). People with strong leadership skills also guide their employees while continuing to communicate and motivate them instead of using traditional hierarchical power associated with their hierarchical rank. Such leaders are flexible and open to change; they understand that every situation requires different tactics (Ganta & Manukonda, 2014; Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015; Farahnak et al., 2020; Walk, 2023).

A leader with strong and extensive leadership skills and attributes can play a vital role in guiding employees towards common goals. Based on the leadership skills and attributes discussed here, it is evident that leaders bring about change through their leadership skills. Thus, integration of change in the context of training leadership skills in higher education is the next logical step for universities to take.

With the increasing gap in leadership skills being taught in higher education (Brandon Hall Group, 2015; Simen & Meyer, 2021) it is becoming increasingly important in the ever-changing job market that leadership skills be developed thoroughly. Higher education institutions, more than any other organization, can make a difference when it comes to the development of leadership skills (Smith & Rosser, 2007; Mwita et al., 2023). First and foremost, the development of leadership skills requires a change in mindset. As studies have shown, it is important that in the ever-changing job market, university studies in leadership skills should focus on change management (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Mansaray, 2019). If universities manage to implement change management principles, students can develop the skills they need to lead teams. Students who can lead and bring about change in their groups gain trust and credibility (Yousem & Beauchamp, 2007; Riwo-Abudho et al., 2012; Ganta & Manukonda, 2014; Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015; Mansaray, 2019; Farahnak et al., 2020; Walk, 2023). Universities already play a significant role

in teaching leadership skills through development programs for students through formal and experiential learning opportunities (Bryman, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2020; Chan, 2023). Some of the key skills universities already teach to prepare students for leadership skills are mentorship, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Channing, 2020; Reitman et al., 2020; Flushman et al., 2021; Miller & Willows, 2023). Adding change management should also be incorporated to train students in leadership skills.

In short, leadership skill development in higher education institutes is a process that is enhanced through activities such as reflective practices (reflection and feedback) and experiential learning practices (which will be discussed in more detail in the following section). Higher education development programs that take into consideration both formal instructions and hands-on experience can help students learn leadership skills. A university curriculum that focuses on employability skills not only prepares students in leadership skills but also provides students with the ability to continue to learn and gain new skills to meet the ever-changing demands of the job market. A good university foundation in employability super skills will prepare students for the challenges ahead in their professional careers.

2.3.6 Concluding the Four Super Skills in the Context of the University.

Based on the theoretical review of employability super skills, the four core skills of communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership appear as a relevant foundation for my Educational Design research (EDR).

In the communication skills category, EDR can be used to focus on design interventions to find effective ways to communicate. Focusing on EDR methods to enhance communication skills in a real-world scenario means developing new educational strategies and programs that facilitate the learning of communication skills. EDR's iterative process can then allow for further refinement of communication skills strategies and programs. This iterative process is done through feedback, reflections, evaluation, and implementation of the strategies again in a real-world scenario. So, the whole EDR process to enhance communication skills is to design a new program, implement it, refine it through feedback and reflection, implement the refinement again, and repeat.

In terms of motivation skills, EDR can be used to understand and enhance motivation skills. Researchers can design strategies to create educational courses that focus on enhancing students' motivation skills. The iterative process of EDR can be used to find out which strategies motivate students the most. This information can then be evaluated and refined to be implemented again. Similarly, the hands-on method of EDR is well-suited when it comes to enhancing students' initiative skills. The empirical nature of EDR is suitable for designing courses that enable students to take initiative and solve tasks and problems together and not wait for instructions from leaders. As with communication and motivation skills, the iterative nature of

EDR also ensures that initiative skills are being developed and enhanced according to the demands of employers.

Lastly, EDR can be used to help students develop their leadership skills. Researchers should design a curriculum that takes into consideration elements that will help students enhance their leadership skills. Like the other three skills, EDR's iterative process also helps researchers use iterations to learn and enhance leadership skills programs for students.

2.4 Reflection, Feedback, and Experiential Learning

EDR's characteristics of practical problem solving, iterative development, and collaboration can provide a solid foundation for enhancing the employability super skills of students. The hands-on and iterative nature of EDR ensures that the designed program is practical and relevant to the needs of real-world challenges. To enhance the super skills of the students who participated in the research for my thesis I will use feedback, reflection, and experiential learning during the whole iterative EDR process. This discussion will also provide an understanding of how I will implement EDR.

Reflection is a process of critical thinking, reviewing (going through an experience repeatedly) and analysing the experiences (in discussion formats) to gain new insights into behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and values, self-awareness, understanding, and limitations (Roberts & Westville, 2008; Karnieli-Miller, 2020; Brownhill, 2022; Alazmi, 2023). Reflection involves, therefore, extracting knowledge from experiences (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014; Alazmi, 2023) in order to create an understanding of the subject or task at hand. Furthermore, reflection leads to in-depth learning (Moon, 2013), creating connections between previous and new knowledge and making the learning more effective (Davis, 2003; Mäeots et al., 2016). Reflection should be done individually and in pairs and should be shared among peers to get further and deeper understanding of the learning. It is an important component in learning as it is when one reflects upon experiences that one can develop learning skills that increase not only competence but professionalism as well (Adams, 2006; Winkel et al., 2017; Brownhill, 2022; Alazmi, 2023).

Reflection is supported by theory as a tool to not only deepen and advance knowledge but also as a guide for learning and exploring emotionally challenging scenarios (Winkel et al., 2017). The role of higher education is therefore important in providing students with an opportunity to learn how to reflect. Researchers have pointed out that if students are asked to question and think critically, they can start to understand broader perspectives and ideas leading to an even deeper and better understanding of the questions about which they are critically self-reflecting. (Roberts & Westville, 2008).

The role of reflection in enhancing super skills such as leadership and motivation skills is also evident in research (Lanaj et al., 2018). For example, Boyd and Fales (1983) describe how reflection can help build strong leadership skills in people. They state that it is by reflecting on one's personal experiences, realizing consequent feelings, assessing experiences, and learning associated lessons that one can identify values, drives, strengths, and weaknesses (Boyd & Fales, 1983). The use of reflection to enhance the leadership skills of students is still being suggested as the following studies show. Lanaj et al. (2018) study argues that using reflection is important for anyone who wants to improve their leadership skills. The study states that reflection gives students more confidence to act like leaders and in a process enhances their leadership skills (Lanaj et al., 2018). Another study (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz) in 2019 states that reflection plays a role in enhancing the leadership skills of students. Reflection helps develop leadership skills such as adaptability, improvement in written communication, increased confidence in managing tasks, and problem-solving (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz), 2019).

Furthermore, the role of reflection in enhancing motivation skills is evident from research. Research on Higher education suggests that HEIs have an important task at hand: i.e., to develop and instil motivation in students (Bridgstock 2009). Cavilla (2017) conducted a study involving 242 high school students to evaluate the role of reflection as a tool for improved motivation and academic performance. The results revealed that a positive correlation exists between reflection and motivation skills. Although there was not a significant change in academic results, around 75% of the students showed more academic motivation (Cavilla, 2017).

In addition to reflection, feedback is essential for learning to occur. Reflection helps students reflect on their own and come up with new experiences. Feedback thus adds value to student experiences by providing an external perspective and can also provide additional insights and guidance to students in their learning. Reflection and feedback together can guide students in their learning process as these two promote not only the current situation that students are in but also guide them to continuous improvement and refinement of their skills, especially soft skills like leadership skills, motivation skills, initiative skills, and communication skills.

Feedback, on the other hand, provides information about how we (groups and individuals) are doing in our efforts to reach a goal (Scherer, 2016). Research suggests that students' learning is enhanced if the feedback given is clear, purposeful, and meaningful (Maag et al., 2022). Thus, feedback can be defined as "a process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018).

In higher education giving feedback to students remains an issue (Maag et al., 2022). Feedback cannot be seen or perceived as a one-way flow of information from the teacher to the students (Hoo et al., 2022). Feedback is a process where students must actively engage with feedback which they receive from various means, such as

communication from teachers and other students, to track, assess, and regulate their learning and to use this information to apply it to the set goals. Nowadays, students are also expected to continue to learn through feedback for their continuous learning (Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2005; Ferguson, 2011; Ahea et al., 2016; Hoo et al., 2022). In one study (Krause et al., 2017), researchers argue that feedback can play a crucial role in communication skills learning for both teachers and students. Krause et al. (2017) also reported that teachers find it difficult to find time to teach communication skills to students. One solution that they discuss is that of peer feedback (Krause et al., 2017).

Feedback plays an important role in enhancing the soft skills of students (Vasanthakumari, 2019) like communication skills (Krause et al., 2017) and motivation skills (Bellhäuser et al., 2023). Researchers have concluded that feedback generally improves learning and motivation skills (Tricomi & DePasque, 2016; Park & Kim, 2021; Theobald & Bellhäuser, 2022) and can also increase soft skills like performance and engagement in students (Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2005; McGinness et al., 2020; Thai et al., 2023).

Feedback essentially motivates people to pursue their goals. The type of feedback given also needs to be considered when motivating people. A study by Fishbach et al. (2006) involving several gym-goers concludes that feedback (both negative and positive) leads to greater motivation depending on the situation (Fishbach et al., 2010).

So far, I have discussed reflection and feedback and their significance in the context of the university. Once students start to reflect and give or receive feedback they start to learn or experience learning. This learning or experiential learning is thus the outcome of reflection and feedback. Thus, it can be said that experiential learning happens through reflection and feedback. Students can take advantage of this experiential learning because it combines both theory and practice. They learn an experience and implement it in practice, which is the central point of Kolb's experiential learning model is all about as well.

Experiential learning was initiated by theorists such as Dewey, Frier, and Piaget (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014), and it has been circulating in higher education ever since (Groves et al., 2013). Experiential learning is a process in which knowledge and skills are constructed and developed with shared reflection (Kolb, 2014; Ikendi, 2023). Experiential learning deals with learning skills, competence, and capacity from one experience via feedback and reflection, and consequently using this learning experience in the next one (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014). Experiential Learning emphasizes the holistic perspective of a person as a learner, and deals with behavioural, cognitive, and affective aspects of learning (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014) as well as referencing, effective reading and gathering information (Groves et al., 2013). Experiential learning therefore provides groups with a chance to 'do' along with 'thinking' (Thomas & Quinlan, 2014) or 'how to think' rather than 'what to

think' (Savage et al., 2015). Researchers have made significant efforts to show how experiential learning may help in providing better learning outcomes as well as being an asset in the development of various skills. These efforts, however, fall short on some accounts where researchers who oppose this learning approach argue that there exists no research using controlled experiments to provide a clear view that experiential learning is superior (Kirschner et al., 2006, p. 79; as cited in Baker, & Robinson, 2016). Even supporters of experiential learning agree that there is a need to establish evidence-based models (Gass, 2005; Henderson, 2004; as cited in Baker & Robinson, 2016).

Experiential learning can be classified into two major categories. Field-based learning includes community-based service learning, co-op education, and internships (Lewis & Williams, 1994; May-Varas et al., 2023). Classroom-based learning, on the other hand, entails role-playing games, case studies, presentations, and a wide variety of collaborative work (Balakrishna, 2023). This type of learning has been growing in breadth and depth since Chickering and Gamson recommended 'active learning' as one of the seven 'principles of good practice' for excellence in undergraduate education in 1987 (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

By introducing experiential learning practices universities can help individuals recognize significant career objectives, take part in business-related techniques, and learn how to attain success in their society (Bridgstock, 2009). In experiential learning, the role of the teacher shifts from information provider to facilitator, guide, or co-learner (Savage et al., 2015; Khartite, 2022). For teaching and training to be effective, it cannot be limited to a mere statement of facts. Rather, it needs to consider the mindset of students as well. This means that teachers give more autonomy to the students, and students are trusted to do more in the class. This is happening and has been reported by researchers where qualified teachers understand the importance of making all the students a part of the learning process (Sims & Sims, 1995; Shadiev & Dang, 2022).

Experiential learning focuses on engaging students actively in exploring questions (reflection) that they find relevant and meaningful (Chapman et al., 1992; Brown, 2023). By using experiential learning, students can apply new understandings to similar tasks which will then be completed in an increased, more meaningful, and expert way (Groves et al., 2013; Kiener et al., 2015; Savage et al., 2015; Ozogul, 2018; Ikendi, 2023). Furthermore, experiential learning helps students figure out how to preserve, keep up and advance in their work (Bridgstock 2009; Groves et al., 2013; Kiener et al., 2015; Savage et al., 2015).

Moreover, Svinicki (2014) support the idea that experiential learning leads to motivation by providing students with autonomy. This autonomy makes them think and apply solutions to complex situations, which, in turn, shapes their learning and provides a chance to practise motivation skills. Thus, experiential learning activities in a class lead to an increase in students' intrinsic motivation (Helle et al., 2007;

Chiu et al., 2023), which helps them learn motivation skills. Furthermore, research also suggests that implementing experiential learning in class can get the students started practicing leadership skills as well (Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2019).

In EDR research, reflection, feedback, and experiential learning are the methods that I plan to implement to assess the development of communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership skills among students. Experiential learning together with reflection and feedback is, therefore, effective and can be applied as a guiding tool for the development of core skills, which can enhance the employability of graduating students. Experiential learning provides students with the opportunity to communicate and learn by doing things which are relevant to them and, ultimately, improves students' soft skills like motivation, among others. When it comes to the development of initiative and leadership skills, experiential learning is one of the suggested activities helping to develop and strengthen these skills. Similarly, reflection and feedback are helpful tools for developing and strengthening communication and motivation skills. Furthermore, as I am focusing on enhancing the employability skills of students in my research, my focus on reflection, feedback, and experiential learning deals with strategies that can be used in the classroom. Experiential learning will be used by students in classrooms to explore an issue, reflect on their practical experiences, share experiences, and gain a deeper understanding of the issues. Next, I will discuss how some experiential learning studies have used reflection and feedback approaches to enhance different soft skills. Afterwards I will combine these studies in a table (Table 2) for visual understanding.

Research conducted by Koponen et al. (2012) used three forms of experiential learning methods for communication skills learning (CSL) and followed 129 second-year medical students over three months. Several elements of drama education and theatre performance were used by the students to put into practice and reflect upon the interaction between a doctor and a patient. These performances were based upon real-life scenarios, and students were able to actively take part in them. The students practised with an actor (a simulated patient) or an associate to play out the real-life scenarios of doctor-patient interaction. Thereafter, the students spent two days in health facilities to first observe and then analyse (reflect on) the doctor-patient communication. Finally, they went on to discuss their learning outcomes in their groups (feedback). The results showed that there was a significant increase in their positive attitudes towards CSL after the course. This positive change can be construed as effective learning in students (Mottet & Bebbe, 2006).

A study by Groves et al. (2013) focused on Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984). This cycle consists of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. A class of sports students in 2010-2011 was chosen for this study. The researchers wanted to see how experiential learning could develop learning skills among the students. They wanted to substantiate the idea that a carefully designed course with reflection and experience can result in

the most effective learning (Groves et al., 2013, 546). This study revealed that with an experiential learning approach, the researchers were able to see students achieve a higher level of critical skills required for successful study at the university level. The researchers finished their research by recommending that teachers implement an experiential learning approach. The study focused on the tutors' view and their perceptions; however, the students' perceptions could have been considered as well. Another thing lacking in Groves et al.'s research was the lack of giving or receiving feedback among students or between tutors and students.

Research by Kiener et al. (2015) used experiential learning in a 16-week-long undergraduate statistics course. The results suggest that group dynamics can contribute to learning outcomes. The four levels of experiences provide evidence that through reflection, students were able to progress and develop in their learning. Since the students and researchers reflected several times, they were able to discuss their observations and, subsequently, were able to learn from each other. This, in turn, resulted in achieving experiences that the students and the researchers can use in future learning situations. As described by the researchers, the small number of participants and the fact that they did not use a control group to compare the results were cited as limitations of this study.

A study by Skinner et al. (2016) at Charles Sturt University (CSU), Australia, encompasses a change made in 2010 in the undergraduate program of physiotherapy where an integrated problem-based learning (PBL) approach was adopted, as opposed to a traditional approach. First- and second-year students were required to take part in role playing to practise the role of a physiotherapist in different scenarios and strengthen their communication skills involving communication with peers, dealing with difficult patients, and having difficult conversations with patients, coping with stressful scenarios as a student, and patient-centred education. The role plays were supplemented by feedback which allowed for self-reflection and alteration. Teachers acted as facilitators to the students, encouraging critical thinking and learning. First-year students were also asked to record themselves in a simulation of a doctor-patient situation. Using this PBL method, they were asked to watch and critique their video recording to reflect on how they could improve. With each passing year, students were given more responsibility and were required to conduct tutorial sessions with their facilitator helping them build interpersonal and leadership skills. The aspect of this curriculum was its multi-faceted experience as students would have worked in eleven different groups by the time they graduated. This would not only give them many opportunities to hone their interpersonal skills but also a chance to learn how to self-evaluate themselves keeping in mind the feedback they receive. Data was gathered using an altered version of the Preparation for Hospital Practice Questionnaire (PHPQ) (Dean et al., 2003; Hill et al., 1998) to determine final year students' outcomes, Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) to record the students' perspective, and qualitative feedback from staff to ascertain

the staff perspective. The results suggest that students were more confident in their independent learning skills and their interpersonal skills. The staff also seemed positive about the PBL approach; however, they had some reservations due to lack of resources and time constraints.

Ritter et al. (2017) conducted a study at Coastal Carolina University, USA that focused on remodelling the curriculum of the introductory management courses. A backward design approach was taken to include experiential learning in the curriculum to facilitate the development of teamwork and other soft skills. Three introductory management courses were changed in 2013. During this period, the principles of management course, organizational behaviour (OB) course, and human resource management (HRM) course, after much discussion, were replaced with a management and organizations course, a leading high-performance teams' course, and a managing human capital course. What was fundamentally different about these new courses was that they not only allowed students to reflect and receive feedback but also engaged them actively in activities that allowed for skill development: group service projects, role plays to put into practice what the students had learnt from self-evaluation, reflection, and feedback from their instructors. The results show that this redesign was effective in improving students' self-efficacy beliefs, actual collaborative knowledge, and teamwork skills. The results also go on to show that students' confidence also improved considerably from working in a team. However, the results also suggest that a soft skills-focused curriculum may compromise the acquisition of theory-based knowledge to an extent. For better visual understanding of the experiential studies discussed in this section I have added them in Table 2. This table helps to summarize the focus of the studies with regards to soft skills and methodology that these studies chose to focus. All these studies used reflection and feedback which made it important for me to summarize these studies into a table.

Table 2 Experiential Leaning Studies Using Reflection and Feedback to Enhance Super Skills

Study	Focus	Employability skills learned	Methodology
Koponen et al. (2012	Experiential Learning for Communication Skills	Attitudes towards Communication Skills Learning (CSL)	Theatre in education, Simulated patients, Role-play via reflection, observation, and feedback
Groves et al. (2013)	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle	Learning Skills	Focus group interviews, Course material, Kolb's model coding, reflection, feedback
Kiener et al. (2015)	Experiential Learning in Statistics Course	Student's value in research and comfortable learning environment	16-week course, Qualitative and Quantitative data collection, and reflection
Skinner et al. (2016)	Integrated Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Physiotherapy	Communication Skills, interpersonal and Leadership Skills	Role plays, Self-reflection, Feedback, Modified PHPQ and SEQ questionnaires for data collection
Ritter et al. (2017)	Experiential Learning in Management Courses	Teamwork skills, Soft Skills	Backward design approach, Group service projects, Role plays, Data collected via surveys and test scores, reflection and feedback

In this sub-section, I have discussed methods that I will be using in my own EDR process. I have also described how the use of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning will provide the theoretical foundation for the implementation of my EDR. In the discussion on experiential learning, I have discussed the importance of learning from experiences to enhance knowledge. This process of learning from experiences, together with reflective practices and receiving creative and timely feedback, have all contributed towards effective learning methods.

Keeping in mind the learning advantages of using reflection, feedback, and experiential learning, I will now discuss Educational Design Research (EDR), which incorporates the very same principles experiential learning showcases in students' learning. In EDR discussions earlier in this chapter I have discussed how EDR is a process that combines both theory and practice to solve problems. In the same way, the use of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning methods is a fundamental

part of my research process since I use these methods in the iterative process of EDR to learn and implement EDR processes.

The iterative nature of EDR allows me to use reflection at every stage of the EDR process. Similarly, when the students work on their super skills reflection, they will also learn and implement learned experiences. The use of reflection in the EDR process means that the learning is being refined, improved, and implemented. As for feedback, I intend to use feedback during the evaluation phase of the EDR process. Feedback collected from students will help me to improve my course. The intention is to improve the course and implement it again. Feedback will also help students learn and share experiences. I have discussed earlier in this chapter that EDR and experiential learning processes are, in principle, the same thing. Both deal with learning outcomes and improving learning. I intend to learn from my experiences during the EDR process and implement my learning experiences into the next iteration of the EDR process.

I believe that using reflection, feedback, and experiential learning in the EDR process will not only enhance my theoretical knowledge, but it will also help me implement my knowledge practically. Doing so will also help me contribute to the enhancement of the soft skills of the graduating students during their university education.

2.5 Summary

This section has introduced the concept of employability, its core concepts and definitions, and theories and models that have been used in employability research in the past. Furthermore, I have discussed the four core skills of employability (communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership) that are being studied in my research. Finally, the tools and concepts (reflection, feedback, and experiential learning) that will be used for the course created for this study have been discussed. I also discussed the research that used one or more of these tools and concepts in the past. These sections highlight that in the ever-changing job market, students need new skills to find jobs and know how to keep jobs. Based on the review of earlier research, it is evident that there is a need to develop research-based ways to enhance university students' employability super skills. My research therefore endeavours to shed light on the super skills of graduates that enhance the academic capabilities of candidates, their chances to obtain employment that is in line with their competence, maintaining said employment, and enabling effective and satisfactory career changes when the need arises.

For students to be able to learn and practice super skills, they need support from higher education institutes. Thus, the discussion in this section has also transitioned towards what higher education can do or provide to students to

further enhance their employability after graduation. One way it can do so is through the use of reflection, feedback, and the experiential learning approaches that I have discussed.

3 BUILDING THE EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION OF EDR

Based on the theoretical basis described in Chapter 2, the next part of my research is to define the empirical foundation of my EDR project. In this chapter, I will introduce the overall setting and course design that I plan to implement in practice in implementation phases I and II of EDR.

3.1 The Research Setting

Students from the Faculty of Arts and Design and from the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland were the primary target group for this research. They were selected because their education programs do not prepare them for any specific occupation (compared to, for example, law or teacher-training programs) but provide them with a more general foundation in the field. I selected these faculties because my aim was to help the students prepare for future employability by enhancing their soft skills (super skills): communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership to be precise. The following is a short description of the two faculties that were chosen for the research. The courses offered in the faculties, especially in the English language, are not many, and the courses offered also change. Thus, I mention a few of the common courses from the two faculties.

In the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland, students learn about the social and cultural aspects of education, media education, and adult education, among other subjects. They are also familiar with vocational training in adult education and issues of work-based learning.

Students who have educational studies as their major are introduced to various perspectives of education and educational phenomena. The curriculum not only acquaints them with theoretical, historical, philosophical, and psychological aspects of education but also takes them through the planning and social and cultural aspects of education. Adult educational studies are rooted in the fundamentals of psychology of learning, organizational psychology, and social psychology. The students are taught about adult learning, adult pedagogies, fields of action for vocational adult education, and educational systems and policies. Students of multidisciplinary media education learn about the history, social aspects, and philosophical foundations of media. They also study the role media plays in society and how it can be used in a pedagogically useful way. The importance of the

psychosocial well-being of individuals and communities is emphasized via different perspectives. Students get a chance to enhance their skills in research and analysis of media.

Students in audio-visual studies learn artistic, expressive, and communicative use of audio-visual media during their studies. They also learn about the cultural, historical, and productive aspects of media. Students choose and combine subjects like moving images, multimedia, game technology and design in audio-visual media programs.

Students in graphic design programs focus on the general understanding of communication and visual design. Students not only learn about practical design but also about its importance. The curriculum focuses on subjects like typography, information design, and illustrated fiction.

The fine art education degree program combines pedagogy, science, and arts. Students are familiarized with visual culture and visual arts in the context of education. The program takes them through their studies in ways that prepare them for working as teachers of fine arts, visual arts, and other similar jobs.

The interior and textile design program are an amalgamation of research and art in the context of textile design and interior design. During their studies, students look at interior design in a multi-sensory way and become well-acquainted with space design, and textile art, design, and manufacturing.

The industrial design degree focuses on product design, service design, and interactive design. Graduates of the program develop strong knowledge in industrial design theory and practice, and the capability to apply this knowledge in research and the business world. Interaction design - the ability to design easy-to-use interfaces - is also taught as a part of industrial design.

Students of clothing design get the opportunity to put together their own development story as a clothing professional. They are taught about clothing from the perspective of fashion, action, and movement to promote one's well-being. They also get to hand-test and examine clothing intended for use under various conditions and activities.

By selecting these two faculties the aim was to help the students prepare for employability in the soft skills (super skills) category. Many of the programs mentioned above do not lead directly to job opportunities like, for example, the ones a student from the Faculty of Law will have. Thus, students from the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Art were invited to participate in my research by attending the workshop-based designed course IEDU0010 to learn and practice super skills: communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership.

3.2 Planning the EDR Process

Educational Design Research (EDR) is done in many iterations/phases (Sloane & Kelly, 2014; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; McKenney & Reeves, 2021; Zhu & Zhang, 2023). The EDR model created by McKenney and Reeves starts with exploration, which leads into design and construction followed by refining; hence, this research has iterations, namely Course 1 and Course 2, where EDR model principles were implemented in iterations. Course 1 started with the planning phase and then the implementation phase. Afterwards, before Course 2 began, the refining phase was added instead of the planning phase, and then the new implementation phase occurred. Therefore, the whole process was Planning, Implementation, Refining, and New Implementation (See Figure 4).

Figure 4 Illustration of the EDR Process in my Research.

The EDR model was implemented two times (two iterations) to collect data. The first iteration (Course 1) consisted of Phases 1 and 2. Phase 1 started with the planning of the course and getting it approved by the faculties involved. During Phase 2 the course was implemented, and data was collected. The data was collected in the form of reflections, feedback from the students, observation notes, and interviews.

I had two objectives which did not change for the data collection in two courses: to enhance super skills and to create a model based on which anyone in future can implement this course to facilitate the development of super skills in workshops. The aims of the course were to:

- Introduce and practice team building by using workshops based on reflection, feedback, and experiential learning,
- Introduce super skills: Communication, motivation/initiative, and leadership,
- Help participants identify the basics of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning,

- Help participants develop strategies to achieve super skills with the help of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning.

The planned learning outcomes were to have the students be able to collaborate, communicate, share knowledge, be creative, learn how to evaluate and do problem-solving in groups as well as individually. In practice, the students were to be able to:

- Evaluate themselves using reflection, feedback, and experiential learning,
- Create their knowledge using super skills,
- Analyse their studies and group work based on the super skills,
- Reflect upon their skills, recognize their personal development and be able to create and evaluate it in writing,
- Evaluate as well as access their employability super skills – mainly communication, motivation/initiative, and leadership.

After the first implementation of the course, the second iteration (the middle stage between Courses 1 and 2) started with Phase 3, the goal of which was to refine the course based on the previous course feedback and facilitator's observations. The purpose of this phase was to refine the course implementation based on experiences and feedback gained from the first iteration.

Phase 4 (Course 2) was the implementation of the refined Course 1. Again, data was collected in the form of reflections, feedback from the students, and interviews. The purpose was to test how Course 2 was implemented and use the data to move to Phase 5 (results interpretation and design solutions).

Phase 5 is the result of the two implementations of the employability super skills course. This phase focuses on the analysis of the two iterations as a whole and forms the basis for finalizing my model.

To reach the objectives and aims of the course, several tasks and practices were chosen. Each of them focused on a certain employability super skill. These tasks, activities, and practices altogether formed the structure of the course. In the following section, these practices will be introduced.

3.3 Selecting the Content for Courses 1 and 2

Creswell, in his 2013 book "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design," suggests that social constructivist research is particularly useful in understanding complex social phenomena such as social inequality, power relations, and social change. He also notes that social constructivist research can be conducted using a range of qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis. Furthermore, Creswell highlights five key principles of social constructivism:

1. Knowledge is constructed through social interaction,
2. Multiple realities exist,
3. The perspectives of researcher and participant are equally important,

4. The emphasis is on language and discourse,
5. Reflexivity and self-awareness.

To design the course for data collection and justify the use of social constructivism in a workshop-based facilitation course that emphasizes reflection, feedback, and experiential learning approaches, Creswell's five principles were taken into consideration. I understood that multiple answers exist to the same situation and that answers can be gathered using tasks and activities. I gave the students the autonomy to create their evaluation criteria based on which their performance was evaluated. I did this because the social constructivism principle says that researcher and participant perspectives are equally important. In terms of language, I was determined to create a task-based course which allows dialogue and discussions regularly. This was intended to create opportunities for the students to construct their own meaning and interpretations: i.e., experiential learning via tasks. The course overall emphasized the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness and recognizing the role of the researcher's own biases and assumptions in constructing knowledge.

Phase I (Course 1) of my research included getting the faculties of Education and Art & Design to approve my course in their syllabuses. The internationalization staff helped me design the master's level course content. With initial help from the supervisors and the internationalization office staff, the completed course content was then sent to the faculties of Education and Art & Design for approval. It was decided among faculty staff that the Faculty of Education would approve this course and that this course would be placed under education, more specifically under educational science. After the course was approved, I then advertised it by email. I was allowed to send emails to incoming students in those two faculties. Flyers were also made and placed in different locations in the university. The course code was IEDU0010, and the name of the course was Employability Super Skills. The course was 3 credits: 1 credit for attending workshops and participating and 2 credits for completing group project work.

The course was divided into two parts. Part One consisted of three workshop days. During this time students participated in tasks, discussions, reflections, and feedback sessions. In Part Two, students worked on a project and met with me twice to discuss their process. I called these two meetings "process meeting days". Altogether there were six meeting days: three days for the initial workshops, two process meeting days, and lastly the presentation day. In between these contact teaching days, students were advised to work on their own and/or in groups to work on their project and to implement and practice their super skills. The models were introduced so that the students had a structured way of performing tasks and activities. These models are not the focus here. I used these models so that the students had something they could then discuss in the form of reflection and feedback to gain experiential learning as well as to keep practising their super

skills. Models like the Divergent and Convergent Model, the Integrated Model of Group Development IMGD, the reflections 4Rs model, the feedback, content and process model, and the learning spiral model were used (see Appendix 1 for the description of the tasks). The relevance of using each task and activity and which task and activity help enhance which super skills is described in Table 3. Altogether I used ten tasks, activities, and models in my workshops in the two courses in two EDR iterations. Lastly, I introduced the four rules of facilitation. I did this to help students understand that they are the ones who need to be asking questions to learn, meaning that they must show curiosity to be able to learn during these workshops. This was important because after the workshop days the students were on their own and reminding them to be curious would help them ask each other questions and keep the conversations going.

Table 3 Illustration of how these Tasks Relate to the Objectives of the Course and Employability Super Skills

Task	**The aim it enhances**	**The employability super skill with which it is connected**
Apple task	Experiential learning, reflection	Communication, motivation, and initiative
Divergent and Convergent model	Feedback, experiential learning	Communication and leadership
Integrative model of group development	Reflection, experiential learning	All four super skills
Reflection 4Rs	Reflection, experiential learning	Communication, motivation, and initiative
Paperclip	Experiential learning	Motivation and initiative
Guidelines/rules and evaluations	Reflection, feedback, experiential learning	All four super skills
Lost at sea	Experiential learning	All four super skills
Feedback	Feedback, experiential learning	All four super skills
Content and Process model	Experiential learning	All four super skills. Everyone is responsible to lead, communicate, motivate, and take initiatives when necessary to keep the group development moving ahead.
Learning Spiral model	Experiences through reflection and feedback	All four super skills
Base of facilitation	Reflection	All four super skills

To sum up, the 11 tasks, activities, and models used were chosen as the practical foundation when planning the course. In Table 3, I have illustrated how these tasks relate to the objectives of the course and employability super skills.

Relevance of Tasks

The research on soft skills discussed in the text shows that more universities are implementing soft skills in their courses. I think that the gap is the implementation of soft skills in a way that students can learn and practice them. This is necessary to increase their employability. Soft skills are needed as one study found that employers not only seek hard skills, but they are also looking for soft skills, like super skills (Kinash & Crane, 2016). Therefore, to increase their chances of employability students must now also learn and practice soft skills. There can be several different ways to learn new soft skills, and in this text, I focus on four specific skills called super skills. Two common umbrella terms to learn and practice super skills would be theory and practice. I chose to deal with the issue practically by introducing a workshop-based facilitation course. The use of tasks and activities with the help of models and methods is, therefore, used to facilitate learning practically. The workshop-based tasks help in starting a conversation, the discussions help in increasing motivation to work in groups, which will also increase the level of communication and initiative among team members. The final project which is part of the course is the time when the leadership role is practised by each member of the group. This way the use of tasks creates an atmosphere that is suitable to practise employability super skills in a very short period.

The data gathered from the participants, along with the personal observations, helped to improve the structure of the course, hence, the first design solution (Chapter 4, Section 4.3). Due to the iterative nature of the study, the first design solution went through a refining phase and then implemented one more time (Chapter 5 Section 5.3). Together a new design solution in the form of a framework presented at the end of the dissertation.

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

3.4.1 Interviews

Interviews in terms of methodology come under the qualitative research method (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research, according to Creswell, focuses on understanding, description, and meaning. Researchers use interviews to collect and gather descriptive data that can help them understand the issues at hand. In conducting interviews, Kvale (1996) suggests that interviews should be open-ended. This allows the researchers to explore the topic at hand in multiple ways (Field et al., 2022). Furthermore, Patton (2023) discusses the importance of selecting participants who are suitable for the topic of the research.

In my first course I was able to create an atmosphere in which participating students were able to communicate with ease. The students managed to share among themselves and with me their knowledge, ideas, and suggestions. They knew that if they tell their ideas the others will listen and not judge the ideas. I wanted to take the advantage of the creative and trusting atmosphere further to collect more data by interviewing them.

I designed the interview guide (see Appendix 2) so that it would include some final reflection from the students. I started the interview questionnaire with some background information, asking students to reflect about the past events, present state, and future implementation of the experiential learning gained during the course. I designed my questions based on the 4Rs reflection approach, the same approach that I used during workshops. Furthermore, to design the interview questions I also took inspiration from Kinash et al. (2015) study. They came up with a detailed questionnaire for their study for students, teachers, and employers. I looked at the questions they asked to the students and used that knowledge to create my questionnaire for interviews. Lastly, many modifications were added with the feedback that I received from the supervisors. I also tested my questionnaire with my friends who also provided useful feedback to improve the interview questions.

3.4.2 Observation

Observation is a common method used in social science research. It is used to conduct research in fields such as anthropology, psychology, education, and sociology. Observation is a systematic and objective way of recording behaviours and events in controlled or natural settings (Denzin et al., 2023). There are a few ways of conducting research using observation. It can be structured or unstructured. Researchers can be participants and still observe (Creswell, 2014; Sharma, 2022; Swain & King, 2022). I implemented IMGD model's four stages on myself during my observations. In the stage 1 of IMGD model I acted as a leader who gives instructions. While the students worked on the tasks I observed their collaboration. This differed for each task. Then I asked questions and let them discuss and during this time I take my notes. When students started their project work, I met them on two process meeting days and after the meetings I added my observation notes. During this time, I acted as leader who is in stage 4 meaning that the students are now on their own and I am just there to observe. This was my structure.

I choose observation as my data collection method because it provided me with the structure through which I was able to collect data during the contact days. My aim was to look for the four super skills in students and make notes based on the discussions that the students were having during the class. Basically, I gave tasks to the students and once they start the task, I would start to observe to look for the presence of any super skill and take note of their conversations to figure out what they are doing to enhance their super skills. As soon as I finished the class, I

would then write down my notes in detail in an online excel sheet. I would write observational notes for each day and then I analysed them using content analysis method.

3.4.3 Reflections and Feedback

Lastly, my data collection was dependent on the reflections and feedback provided by the students. I also collected this reflection and feedback from the students every day and kept it in the same excel sheet where I wrote my observation notes.

Students used 4Rs method to reflect and then sent their reflections to me every day via email. I added these reflections in the same excel sheet where I added my observation notes. Feedback was also collected via email from the students and was added in the excel sheet. Students gave feedback based on the tools I provided.

Reflections, feedback, observations, and interviews have all helped me to gather data from the participants. My aim was to gather data to discuss super skills enhancement in the students. I also aimed to discuss the journey of each participant. I want the readers to learn how each participant started the journey of enhancing super skills.

3.4.4 Participants and Data Collection

In Phase I, the first course was conducted in September - October 2019, and the interviews were conducted in November 2019, almost a month after the course ended. The course was offered to the students in the Faculties of Art and Education at the University of Lapland. During the first iteration of the EDR process, in Phase I, I planned two separate classes for education and arts students. Eleven students (S1 – S11) in total participated in the first phase course: two students (Faculty of Arts) in the first class and 9 students (both faculties) in the second class.

In Phase II, the course was conducted in January and February of 2020. The interviews were conducted in March and April of the same year. The course was offered to both the faculties of education and arts at the same time, thus, there were not two separate classes, as in the previous iteration. Four students (two students from the Faculty of Arts and two from the Faculty of Education) enrolled in the course. In the research data, they were given the names S12 – S15. S15 joined on the second day, thus missing the first workshop day. Her classmates got her up to speed on what she had missed, and I gave the students some extra time at the beginning of Day 2 to do so. S13 opted out of the interview; therefore, only S12, S14, and S15 participated in interviews after the course ended. The interviews were done online and in person, and I recorded the conversation using my mobile phone and later transcribed the conversations.

During the contact days in both the phases, I was the only facilitator present. My job was to conduct my workshops and lead the students towards their objectives (practice super skills). My role as a facilitator diminished with time as the students

were given more autonomy and started to make their own decisions to finish their tasks and project work. During my early workshops with the students, I was also supposed to take notes for my observations regarding my data collection, but as I was the only person conducting this research and doing two jobs, I only took notes in the form of main points. Immediately afterwards when I went back to my office, I wrote down in detail my observations based on the notes that I took during the class on an Excel sheet. From Day 3 onwards, as students were working on their projects, I made fewer observations; therefore, I took notes during process meeting days and on the final project day.

My observational notes during both the phases consisted of observing the students' super skills maturity over time. I took most of the notes when the students were working in their groups on different tasks and activities, and using these notes, I asked further questions during reflection and feedback discussions after the group tasks were over. This way I was checking that the observations in my notes were correct and based on the answers I was getting; most of the time my observations were the same as the answers I was getting, and sometimes I adjusted my notes if I realized I had misunderstood something. This was my process of taking notes from my observations.

The data collected (both phases) in the form of reflections and my observation notes was stored in an Excel file for both phases (approximately 25 pages in word document), whereas the interviews were recorded and saved on my phone and were later transcribed during both phases. The recordings were about 18 minutes on average, and the transcribed text from each recording spanned about 10 pages on average (12 interviews equal to 120 pages).

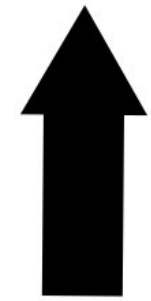
I conducted interviews with the participating students one month after the conclusion of the course in both phases. My questions were based on the 4Rs reflection approach that I used during workshops. The interviews provided one final opportunity for students to engage in reflection with me. Therefore, I prepared questions in segments. I started with some basic background information questions and then I asked the students to review or summarize the past events specifically about super skills. Once the students were able to recall and tell me about their achievements regarding their super skills, I asked them if they had continued to practise and use their learning in the past month. After these questions, I asked them for their feedback about the course itself and, finally, I asked them about their future strategies and plans in using super skills.

3.5 Data Analysing Methods

Content analysis is used in this study. Krippendorff (2018) defines content analysis as "a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use". In content analysis, the

large text is divided into small portions to identify and interpret meaning. This is done to find important concepts that then can be used to describe a phenomenon (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Content analysis involves analysing and interpreting text in a systematic form to identify patterns, themes or any other information related to the subject. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), furthermore, divide content analysis interpretation into four stages: condensation, code, category, and theme.

In this study, Erlingsson and Brysiewicz's (2017) method of interpretation (four stages) of the text from interviews is used (see examples of the four stages in Figure 5 and Table 4). The process of condensing statements into codes and categories helped me to organize categories in such a way that I was able to assign them to the four super skills. In few instances I was also able to designate themes to final categories.



Overarching theme	The emergency center through patients' eyes- Alone and cold in chaos	My example
Theme	Not a person, just a body in the hectic EC	Supportive environment through trust and cooperation
Category	Staff actions and non-actions	Support
Code	Left alone	No support
Condensed meaning units	Pushed to the middle of the room, walked away, left me	Did not get the support from university in studies as expected
Meaning unit	They pused me into the middle of the room and then walked away... they just left me	My current experience is overall not good because I'm not feeling supported by the university in my studies

Figure 5 Example of Analysis Leading to Higher Levels of Abstraction; From Manifest to Latent Content (taken from Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Content analysis in my research is used to analyse student reflections, feedback, interviews, and observation notes. The super skills of communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership were individually analysed to understand how reflection, feedback and experiential learning workshops enhanced the super skills of the students. The whole process was done manually by reading through the transcribed interview text and assigning codes manually (see Sections 4 & 5).

Table 4 Glossary of Terms Used in this Hands-On Guide to do Content Analysis (taken from Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Content Analysis stages	**Example from Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017**	**My example based on Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017**
Condensation	Condensation is a process of shortening the text while still preserving the core meaning	Example text from one question: My current student experience is overall not good because I'm not feeling supported by the university in my studies. **Condensation:** Did not get the support from university in studies as expected.
Code	A code can be thought of as a label; a name that most exactly describes what this particular condensed meaning unit is about. Usually, one or two words long	No support
Category	A category is formed by grouping together those codes that are related to each other through their content or context. In other words, codes are organised into a category when they are describing different aspects, similarities or differences, of the text's content that belong together. When analysis has led to a plethora of codes, it can be helpful to first assimilate smaller groups of closely related codes in sub-categories. Sub-categories related to each other through their content can then be grouped into categories. A category answers question about who, what, when, or where. In other words, categories are an expression of manifest content, i.e., what is visible and obvious in the data. Category names are factual and short.	Support **Explanation:** In one question that I am using as an example here there were seven categories that I came up with. Then I combined categories further by looking at all the categories in all the questions. And finally, I categorised these categories based on the super skills. Each of the super skill categories has been defined and discussed in the results and discussion section.
Theme	A theme can be seen as expressing an underlying meaning, i.e., latent content, found in two or more categories. Themes express data on an interpretative (latent) level. A theme answers questions such as why, how, in what way, or by what means? A theme is intended to communicate with the reader on both an intellectual and emotional level. Therefore, poetic and metaphoric language is well suited in theme names to express underlying meaning. Theme names are very descriptive and include verbs, adverbs and adjectives.	"Supportive environment through trust and cooperation" Note: Not all questions produced themes. But on some occasions, I was able to come up with a theme, and that is mentioned in the results and discussion sections of the thesis.

During my content analysis in both phases using Erlingsson and Brysiewicz's (2017) method, I read each statement many times to condense it to give it a label. I did this for each participant's statement. At some point when I had a large number of condensed statements and labels, I started to categorize the labels. At first, there were many categories which overlapped with others in terms of the meanings. Thus, I further combined many of the categories into a single category. I give example in figure 5 and Table 4 about how I worked with the transcribed data and coded it. The coded statement is then assigned to a category. Lastly category was then assigned to a theme. The example sentence I used ended up into a theme that I named "supportive environment through trust and cooperation".

The course was conducted in two iterations based on the EDR approach. While analysing the text and keeping in mind content analysis methods, I came up with the main findings for each super skill. These main findings also represent an important distinction. In this research the focus is on the *Process*, while the *Content* is secondary; therefore, the main findings are process-based findings (see Sections 4 & 5).

3.6 The Researcher's Position

In Section 1.2 I discussed my ontological and epistemological approach and my choice of going with the socio-constructivist approach in this thesis while using EDR process. Here I want to further discuss my positionality (Holmes, 2020) regarding my research. I start by defining the term positionality and then I discuss my position accordingly. The term positionality "both describes an individual's world view and the position they adopt with respect to a research task and its social and political context" (Holmes, 2020). Positionality "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). I do not have any political context to discuss regarding my research, and I have already discussed my social context in Section 1.2. My worldview and the position I adopted are based on my previous education and the literature review I conducted during this research.

The literature review helped me understand the need for soft skills in terms of employability after graduation. I have two master's degrees in education: media education and media management. My previous education helped me use my knowledge and experience to enhance the soft skills of the students who participated in my data collection course. I have done pedagogical training in teaching at the University of Oulu. I have also done studies in process facilitation methodology. Combining these studies and experiences and the fact that I can teach at the university level have all contributed to my current study and given me the necessary confidence to do this research.

Before I discuss my current participants, I want to discuss some of my experiences in facilitation and conducting workshops with students at the university level. In the past I have conducted workshops to help students understand the importance of feedback and reflection. Those workshops were conducted with my classmates and friends who were studying at the University of Lapland. In the current study, I had no prior contact with the students who participated in my research. All the participants joined the course based on the emails and flyers that I sent and posted at the university. The participants joined the course because they wanted to learn soft skills and because they wanted to learn more about enhancing their chances of employability. In short, I had no prior contact with the participants, the participants joined the course to learn about employability, and the data collected from them is a combination of the reflections and interviews of the participants and my observation notes. I have added my observation notes in the analysis of the results, and I have done everything I could do to avoid any personal interests when writing or analysing observations. The participants were informed about the research and were also informed why this research was being carried out and its importance to graduate employability. Wendler and Grady (2008) have described what kind of information should be given to research participants so that they know the relevance, their contribution towards the research, the relationship between their participation and the impact of research from their participation, and practical implications related to research. Wendler and Grady (2008) recommended doing this so that the participants have a proper understanding of the research and their role in it. Thus, I tried to answer any questions that the participants had about my research during the course. One such question was regarding participating in my interviews. In the first iteration one student did not want to participate in the interview. He said that he has given me everything he wanted to say in his reflections and feedback. He did not participate later in the interviews. Similarly, in the second iteration one student was hesitant in the interview. Once I explained that the interview will help gather information on the participants if they were able to practice soft skills after the course or not and to what extent. That student then agreed to give interview. According to my understanding, no one refused to participate in the interviews in order to avoid giving me negative feedback about the course. Interviews were done in a very open climate and students spoke freely and had the opportunity to say anything they wanted to say and is reported extensively in the text.

In this research, I want to enhance the soft skills of the students so that they have better chances of attaining employability after graduation. This gives my research value, and I believe that the facilitation methodology of using a workshop approach helped me enhance the soft skills of the students. I will discuss my values, biases, and how these impacted my research next.

I believe that reflection, feedback, and experiential learning play an important role in enhancing the soft skills of students. This belief comes from my previous

experience in workshops that I have conducted in universities in Finland and Norway. I have tried my best not to force my biases into the content analysis of the data. When analysing interview data, Creswell (2014) warns that researchers should be aware of not just reporting good or positive results, that they should report the data as it is and let the results speak for themselves. Because of my previous experience of using facilitation, I knew how important it is for students to use these facilitation methods to learn soft skills. According to Traynor-Foster (2015): "A common cause of conflict of interest in educational research is the desire to prove a hypothesis or obtain specific results." I knew that I had a conflict of interest in this study as I firmly believed that facilitation helps enhance students' soft skills. I approached the interview and other data in a data-driven manner, which meant that I was open to themes arising from students' perceptions and experiences. Through the EDR iterations, I was able to reconsider my interpretations.

Lastly, it is important for me to discuss my position on biases here. Biases are "an inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair" (Smith & Noble, 2014). I am confident that I had no such biases during my research. My focus was only on providing space to the students to enhance their soft skills and to collect data from the students. Therefore, when it came to data collection, designing the research, and doing content analysis of the text, interviews, and observations, I actively avoided any potential biases and focused on the results of my research and analysed the data as it was.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research conducted is Educational Design Research EDR (see Section 1.3). Educational Design Research (EDR), like any other research, presents several ethical challenges for researchers, such as obtaining informed consent from students, the selection of participants, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participating students, identifying, and easing potential risks if the students are underage, and providing post-intervention support. In addition, researchers must be mindful of power dynamics and participant vulnerability, data ownership and use, cultural sensitivity and diversity, equity and access, and community engagement and partnerships (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Ocloo et al., 2021). To ensure that participants' rights and welfare were protected, I carefully evaluated and focused on these ethical risks throughout the research process. I had no consent issues with my participants as they were all adults and were willingly participating in the research. However, I have taken care to protect their privacy (Creswell, 2014) by not using their names or any other information which could help readers identify them. I used codes in place of the names of the participants ("S" for Student followed by a number).

To do any research one must consider ethics (Pietilä et al., 2020; Suri, 2020). I focused on adult students without any potential risk to harm them, and therefore, any ethical review before data collection was not needed. I informed the students about the importance of their participation as they would be sharing their opinions and experiences. They were informed that with their collaboration I wanted to develop a course that would enhance their employability super skills. I designed the course, and I implemented the course. I also collected the data and analysed it by myself. This may raise a question of self-biased and data manipulation to show the only positives and hide negative results. About the course, yes, I made it, but I had feedback from my supervisors in the making of the course. The internationalisation office of the university also helped in the making of the course. Therefore, the course was up to the standards of the university courses. I was fully aware that the topic of my research is very important to me as a facilitator. The techniques I used are the techniques I have been trained in and therefore, I knew that reflection, feedback, and experiential learning approaches are useful tools for the students. But I did not know how these tools will help with the enhancement of super skills. I therefore knew that I have some personal biases in all this. I was fully aware of it, and I have done my best to keep my biases aside as I approached the data with data-driven mind when I analysed the data using content analysis.

There might also be a question about the specific super skills I used in this study. Why I only used these four skills and nothing else? These four skills were deemed necessary skills for gaining employability in the Kinash et al. (2015) research by the employers. Also, there was time when I wanted to add more soft skills but that would have expanded the conceptual and theoretical approach of my research wider. I wanted to stay focused on how to enhance soft skills through reflection, feedback, and experiential learning. Universities can of course choose to enhance any other soft skill of their students which the employers are seeking at any given time. Today the employer might want motivation and initiative skills but tomorrow they might want someone with more empathy skills. Coming back to my biases, in the results section there are over whelming number of positive comments about four super skills. That is not due to my wishes to only include positive results. I can only assure that this is the case and I only present the results as they are.

As, I was also conducting a university course with ECTs, I had to make evaluation for each participating student. How was it possible for me to evaluate fairly using a workshop-based course? I did create an evaluation criterion, but I also involved the students in creating their own evaluation method. I used the combination of both criteria and came up with evaluation method. Based on this method students wrote down their reflection. The reflections, process meetings, and my observations have all contributed to the evaluation of the students' work during the course. This was to ensure that I was fair in my course evaluation. Furthermore, I have mentioned earlier briefly that my role as a facilitator diminished with time. I mean that at first

the students needed me to solve their assignments (tasks) but then my role was less involved and by the end of day 3 students were on their own to complete their tasks (final project). Therefore, I was an authority in the class, but students were the ones who did all the work, and I had no influence in their decision making. Therefore, all the work that students have done in the class and in the project was their own. I just observed and asked questions to collect my data. My questions were open ended so that the students can reflect on their learning and can provide more material for data collection.

Students were also informed that by participating in the course they would also develop their super skills. The students were informed that their collected data would be analysed anonymously. Lastly, they were informed that at any point during the research, they were allowed to withdraw from the course and their data will not be used. They were informed that attendance, as well as their participation in the project, was mandatory to get the course credits. Two students opted out of the interviews; other than that, no one missed a single class during the whole course in both iterations/phases.

During the course, the students were given enough breaks and free time to recoup, gather their thoughts and start working again. They were allowed to leave at any time, but if anyone left, it was the responsibility of the group to keep the person up to date. Participation in group discussions was not mandatory but was not an issue as everyone participated. This can be seen through the reflections that are recorded in the results section.

4 EDR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE I

4.1 Description of the Setting

The course was offered in 2019 to the students in the Faculties of Art and Education at the University of Lapland. During the first iteration of the EDR process, in Phase I, I planned two separate classes for education and arts students. Six meeting days were schedule for each class. The students were also expected to work on individual and group tasks between meeting days for the classes. The first three meeting days were conducted simultaneously, and the remaining three days included a one-week break for individual and group work on the final project.

4.2 Description of the Implementation

The following is the description of activities done on each day. These activities include participating in workshops and discussions afterwards. Reflection, feedback, and experiential learning were part of this discussion process. Students were able to learn from one experience and then implement what they learned in their next tasks through the process of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning. In brief, it closely followed the EDR process.

Day 1 – Implementation 1

The following is a short overview of the topics and activities conducted on Day 1. As the course facilitator I took notes; these notes, along with the reflections and feedback that the participants provided, are summarized after this short overview.

1. Introductions
2. Check-in
3. Apple Task
4. Integrated Model of Group development (IMGD) (verbal introduction)
5. Divergent-Explore-Convergent model (verbal introduction)
6. Reflection model 4Rs
7. Leadership slides
8. Check-out
9. One new term (word) the students had learned.

Discussions took place after each task and activity listed here. This means that there were multiple times when students did reflection, shared it, provided general

feedback, and in the process gained valuable experience. The discussions resulted in collective as well as individual learning experiences. Finally, the students were also asked to write down their reflections and feedback and send them to me.

Day 1 Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

The reflection process is as follows. First, the individuals closed their eyes for a minute and recalled the event and discussion that had just happened while also keeping in mind the 4Rs model. After a minute of silent reflection, they were asked to write down their thoughts in the form of a reflection. This is because once they had written the reflection, they could easily share it with others. The students were then placed in pairs to share their reflections. The sharing of individual reflections among teammates helped students achieve new understanding and new learning. Sharing not only helps the person who is sharing, but it can also give ideas to the person who is listening. Reflection is, therefore, a tool that helps both the speaker and listener. After the pairs had shared their reflection, they were asked to share their thoughts with the whole class. This way everyone was able to listen to each other and comment and give feedback. This was the reflection process after each activity. This means that on each day reflection happened more than once. The final task at the end of each day was to go home and write down their reflections and send them to me. The students had the 4Rs model and some basic reflection questions (See Appendix 2) to use as guidelines in writing their reflections. Some of them wrote a reflection specific to a single task, and some described their overall feelings (learning) of the whole class day. A few just wrote summaries or thoughts (a kind of self-understanding of the situation).

During Day 1 feedback was not discussed and I only asked the students to write feedback for me concerning the material or my facilitation.

As far as I observed, the students were able to understand the importance of both verbal and non-verbal ways of communication as a result of experiential learning via their reflective practices that happened on both the individual and group levels throughout Day 1. In agreement with what Chang (2019) has reported, their reflections consisted of topics such as learning from others, group dynamics, motivation skills, and leadership skills. I also observed how this process started to introduce the importance of collaboration among peers for the sake of learning and practicing super skills. For example, the interactive nature of the tasks and activities helped the students understand motivation, whereas self-reflection helped them understand why taking the initiative and practising initiative skills not only benefited their growth but also the growth of the whole group. One example that can demonstrates that the students were thinking of ways to implement their learning is that one student stated in the class that by using reflection and experiential learning it is possible to find new thesis topics, thus showing the motivation to use learning from one experience to implement it in another task.

Day 2 – Implementation 1

On the second day, the participants were introduced to some new concepts of facilitation throughout the day to help them better understand the importance of practising super skills. One important task was to create evaluation criteria upon which I was to assess their performance throughout the course. This way I involved the students in the implementation of the course, and they felt equally responsible for their performance during the course and their (learning) results.

During day 2 the following topics were covered:

1. Paper-clip task
2. Making guidelines/rules to follow while working on a group task
3. Discussion of feedback
4. Discussion of the Content and Process model
5. Further discussion of the Divergent-Convergent model
6. Discussion of Experiential learning/the learning spiral
7. Basics of Facilitation
8. One new word students had learned

The students started the day with check-in, after which there was a session on learning about creativity. The Paperclip task was used to help students learn about creativity and of course to get them started practicing super skills. The students were given 15 minutes to write down possible uses of a paperclip. It was an individual task, and the only instruction was to not stop writing and continuously think about the uses of paper clips. This was because I wanted them to reach the limit of their brain's creative capacity and overcome their brain's creative capacity hurdle to find more ways of using paper clips.

Regarding the main task for Day 2, the groups in both classes came up with guidelines and evaluation questions by using a divergent-explore-convergent model that they then followed throughout the course individually and as a group. From Day 3 onwards, the students used this evaluation questionnaire to reflect and sent me their reflections. With the help of these reflections and my observational notes during the class, I was able to assess their performance in the class for grading purposes. As the students were involved in making their guidelines for working in groups, they felt that they were part of the decision making and felt responsible for following their own set of rules and evaluation criteria for the rest of the course.

Students from each class at first answered only their evaluation questions. However, for the project work (the remaining part of the course from Days 4 to 6), I combined questions from the two classes as follows:

1. Was the participation active?
2. How did we solve a problem?
3. What kind of communication did we use?
4. Did we apply feedback and reflection?
5. How does the individual want to consider (the) learning in the future?

6. How did we use the super skills for (to complete) the assignment?
7. How did the collaboration work out? Was it successful?
8. Did everyone participate in the group work?
9. Did our super skills improve between the first and the last class?
10. Am I happy with the result of our work?
11. Am I happy with the result of my work?

During the project work both classes answered these 11 questions. Both classes had the same day for their final presentation. Hence the evaluation questions needed to be the same for everyone.

Day 2 Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

On Day 2, the students were finally allowed to give each other feedback. As this was their first time, I asked them to start with positive feedback which could then be followed by some kind of constructive statement. Reflection became personal, meaning that I asked the students to share their thoughts using "I" to start the sentence. This was intended to make them own their statements.

During this day all the participating students were busy practicing different super skills, and they had reflective discussions multiple times. During these discussions, I was able to observe that the students displayed a willingness to participate and even made sure that all the group members were able to participate. Some students showed more interest in reflection than others, while a few students found it difficult to reflect and share. I observed that the students were finding it difficult to give feedback to each other. I think that was due to the fact that the groups were newly formed, as well as cultural differences and age gaps that hindered feedback giving and receiving. The students' motivation to continue to work energetically throughout the day was evident as I did not receive a single complaint about the day's activities from the student feedback and reflections they sent after Day 2.

Day 3 – Implementation 1

The overall purpose of this day was to summarize the first two days before introducing the month-long project work. The project was planned so that the students could work in their groups for at least a month and practice their super skills in real-life situations. During the first half of the class, the students worked on the last task (Lost at Sea) that I had planned for the day, followed by reflections and discussions. Lastly, before the project introduction, I summarized the previous days and stressed the roles of leadership and members in a group setting. I reminded them to practise leadership roles one by one while working on the project.

During Day 3 the following topics and activities took place:

1. Check-in
2. Lost at Sea
3. Group Development Model - IMGD

4. Feedback practice session
5. The roles of leader and member were discussed again
6. Project
7. Check-out

One student, in the feedback from Day 2, had suggested working in a bigger group. Therefore, for the Lost at Sea task I decided to honour this feedback and let the whole class work together for the second part of the task. The task was divided into two parts: individual and group. For the individual part, individuals had 15 minutes to itemize items based on their own priorities. The same was then done in the whole group. After listening to each other, the group had to agree collectively before the final decision was made for each item on the list. Initially, I gave them half an hour to complete the task, but it turned out that they needed one and a half hours.

The reflections and discussions after the task showed that the group understood the importance of working in a team. It was clear to them that if they wanted to survive, they had to work as a team and increase their group development to Stage 3 or 4 of the IMGD model. This task also helped the group prepare for project work and working as a team. Seeing that they could not survive individually and that they could survive only as a group was an eye-opening moment that I could see and observe in their eyes and their behaviour afterwards.

After the task and a short break, I summarized our previous day's activities with a small discussion. Most importantly I discussed the group development model elaborated by Susan Wheelan (2005) and the roles of a leader and a member while working in a group. This discussion lasted about 30 minutes. After the lunch break time, the students were asked to give each other feedback before they started on the project. The feedback started with the following phrases:

What I like about you is...

What I want to see more in you is...

I gave the students a few minutes to make notes on what to say. As they were in groups of three, each student had to give feedback to two students.

The project brief was based on finding solutions to real-life issues. OpenIDEO[1] is a company that provides solutions to real-life challenges based on human-centred design, and the brief was taken from the many ongoing challenges from this website.

Once I introduced the website it was up to the groups to agree on the task selection, planning and selecting leadership, implementation of the planning, and coming up with the final solution. They had about three weeks before the final presentation day. Another instruction was to present not only the results/solution to the given problem at hand but also to evaluate group and individual performance and present it on the final day. The groups had to meet with me on process meeting

1 https://www.openideo.com/approach

Days 4 and 5, as well as schedule meetings of their groups in their own time between Days 4 and 5 till they had finished their work and were ready to present the results. On the meeting days, the groups had to come in and discuss the process. They were not allowed to discuss anything related to the actual task/content with me.

Day 3 Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

The reflection I received from the students dealt with the significance of listening, trust, idea-sharing, communication within groups, understanding the role of everyone's involvement, leadership, doing research beforehand, decision-making as a leader and as a member, and understanding experiential learning.

The feedback I received discussed the importance of tasks and activities that the students used to learn and practice their super skills. They mentioned, for example, that they could build trust and understand each other better through the tasks and activities. However, one challenge that a few students mentioned involved working in large groups and coming up with solutions, as it was hard for a large group to decide on a solution and communicate in a short time. Lastly, a few students did not like the fact that they had to choose a topic that was not related to their studies, but they understood that they were focusing on building soft skills and that working on a topic that demanded a real-world solution was beneficial to their learning process.

I observed that the atmosphere created during the course allowed the groups to have productive discussions during their project work. I observed this during our process meeting day conversations. I also observed that the motivation of the students increased as their communication and listening to each other while working in groups increased. For some, it was easy because they had the same cultural background, while some focused on the performance of the group over their individual feelings. Student feedback showed me that they were focusing on trust-building and assigning clear roles within their groups.

Day 4 – Implementation 1

Day 4 dealt with the following:

1. Evaluation questions answered,
2. Individual process meeting,
3. Group process meeting.

On Day 4 the groups came in one by one for their meeting with me. While I was with one member of the group, the rest of the group was answering the evaluation questions. These questions also acted as reflection questions that could guide the students on their learning journey. I spent about 10 minutes with each student and half an hour with the group. This way I was able to know where they were in the group development stages both as individuals and as a team. We did not discuss anything about their project or the contents of it. This meeting was focused on their learning journey.

In the meetings the students mentioned some of the problems that a newly formed group might have: for example, they had problems understanding the topic, someone was not paying attention to the group work, and someone not contributing or sharing at all. By discussing individually with each student, I was able to help them remember the roles of members and leaders and how to proceed. These meetings were highly appreciated by the students, and many wished that other teachers would do the same.

Day 4 Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

Many of the students reflected on their current learning experiences and what they intended to do with their experiences in future. The students used the evaluation questions as a starting point to write their reflections.

The students discussed their super skills practice in their reflections and feedback. They also discussed the atmosphere, trust-building, and leadership roles within their groups. Many found it difficult to take a leadership role, but they did it to learn and practice their leadership skills. Some other themes that came up were listening and being able to listen, ideation, research sharing, motivation, verbal and non-verbal communication, and experiential learning. The only problem that I faced in the answers was that they were too brief for a complete reflection as per the 4Rs model of reflection.

After Day 3, my advice was that the groups should meet many times so that they would have time to practise their super skills, but this did not occur as I expected. Group 1 only met once physically between Day 3 and Day 4. They focused mainly on their research and the writing part of the project work. They knew that they needed a leader to practise their leadership role, but both the members hesitated to take on such a role because of the fear of conflicts as well as not meeting more times before the Day 4 meeting. However, they followed the structure well (workshop days). Their evaluations showed their motivation, and they mentioned their goals very well during their one-on-one meetings with me. In contrast, Group 4 met twice to discuss and reflect and made changes to their work from the feedback they provided to each other. Groups 2, 3 and 4 did not fully work on the process as I was expecting because they were focusing more on the task than on skills practice. From the meetings I observed that their motivation skills practice was medium to high, but initiative skills practice was lacking in Groups 2, 3, and 4. In my observation, all the groups were in stage 1 of the IMGD model because they expressed hesitancy by avoiding leadership skills practice due to the fear of conflicts, which shows that they need more focus on developing their leadership skills. There are five stages of IMGD model by Susan Wheelan (Åkerlund et al., 2021). The first stage requires that there is a leader, and the role of leader is vital whereas, in stage 4 the role of leader is not vital anymore. Thus, it is important to strive as a group to be in stage 4 of IMGD model. The final stage is a termination phase. This means that the group that has

worked for long can say their goodbyes in a structured way.

Day 5 – Implementation 1

Day 5 focused on the following:

1. Evaluation questions answered.
2. Individual process meetings.
3. Group process meeting.

Day 5 Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

After the last process meetings, there was a significant increase in the quality and frequency of reflections that I received from the students. Furthermore, the students more frequently followed the 4Rs method in writing their reflections. The students reflected on the importance of idea-sharing, ideation process, listening, and trust-building to name a few. Some acknowledged in their reflections that they would implement their learning in the future. However, feedback remained a challenge for both members and leaders due to the fear of conflicts.

Observations

In my observations, Group 1 showed strong teamwork and personal growth even though they met only once between Day 4 and Day 5. Apart from meeting once this group showed improvement in their group development through their satisfaction of working as a team and the plans that they shared for future collaboration. The way they communicated in the process meeting, along with showing their initiative-taking and their focus on motivation skills practice, placed them in Stage 3 of the IMGHD model. Group 2, which met three times, showed increased interest in research and task completion, which also advanced them to Stage 3 of the IMGD model like Group 1. They did not write as many reflections as Group 1 did but they focused more on practising super skills, mostly leadership skills. Group 3 remained in Stage 1 of the IMGD model to avoid conflicts that they faced during their group work. Both leaders and members avoided giving feedback in times of need. Group 4 managed to address their conflicts, which positioned them in Stage 2 of the IMGD model. As this group was addressing their conflicts, there was a potential for the group to advance to Stage 3 through the conflict resolution and trust-building that occurs in such situations. Overall, in my observation, I noted that the students were making efforts in conflict resolution and more open communication so that they could build stronger bonds as a team.

Day 6 – Implementation 1

On the final presentation day, all four groups attended the class at the same time. During day 6 the following events took place.

1. Check-in

2. Presentations
3. Feedback
4. Check-out

Day 6 Presentations, Reflections, Feedback, and Personal Observations

The session started with the check-in after which it was presentation time. I left it to the groups to decide how they wanted to start the presentations, when they wanted to give feedback, and when they wanted to discuss each presentation. I did not set a time limit for the presentations; therefore, all the groups had enough time to present, discuss, and give each other feedback during the discussions. The groups decided to have brief feedback and general discussion after each presentation. In their presentation Group 1 discussed both process and content. During their process discussion, they highlighted their journey from start to finish and put forth arguments on why they thought they had reached Stage 3 of the IMGD model. Similarly, Groups 2, 3, and 4 addressed their process and content in the same pattern as Group 1. These groups managed to reach Stage 2 of the IMGD model. In general, the groups discussed the advantages they gained through reflection, feedback, and experiential learning while covering the process part of their presentations. The feedback the students gave each other regarding the presentations showed that they cared about each other's performance. In the case of Group 2, they addressed eye contact issues with the audience, and for Group 4, for example, it was the time management issue while the presentation was going on. Group 3 showed their preparedness in terms of time management during presentations, but they discussed the struggles they faced with audience engagement. All in all, I saw the need to practise giving constructive feedback to both leaders and members as this was something many groups struggled with and the reason why some groups did not manage to get to Stage 3 of the IMGD model.

Summary of Course 1

The course was divided into two phases. In Phase 1 the students practiced super skills via reflection, feedback, and experiential learning workshops. Later they implemented their learning in the group project work in Phase 2. During the first three workshop days, the students created their evaluation criteria to pass the course. They learned about group development models and paid attention to what stage they were at during their project work. This helped build trust among team members and made them able to communicate effectively during their project group work.

As far as project work goes, all the groups showed their grasp of both content and process. They all participated in their group work equally, and no one just pretended to work and get the reward at the end. The members made sure they followed the rules they set in the evaluation questionnaire (Day 2), and this helped them work efficiently. Furthermore, rotating the roles of being a leader and a member helped

them divide the tasks and make sure that everyone was doing what was supposed to be done.

Taking responsibility for the entire group is crucial for strengthening trust and unity. To address this, I proposed that group members take breaks together, ensuring that they worked as a team and were aware of each other's whereabouts should anyone ask. However, instances occurred, even on the final presentation day, where the whereabouts of individuals was unknown. By the end of the course, however, I saw that the members knew that their missing member was on their way. One group assembled outside first and came together into the class. Another issue that I want to emphasize is giving feedback, especially constructive feedback, which is something many of them were afraid to do. Even though I discussed this, they all knew that feedback, when given, was not personal.

The last class was dedicated to the presentations. I was expecting to hear about the results of their group work as I had forgot the instructions which I gave to them on Day 1. The instruction was to give the final presentation about both content and process. All four groups added their journey (process) into their presentations that they went through during the course and which I was not expecting (as I myself had forgot) to be part of their presentations. I was planning to ask questions about the process in the Q&A session. Since the groups presented details about the process during the presentation, the Q&A session was not needed. After the discussions were over, the students said their farewells to each other. The class was dismissed, and after a month I had my interviews as scheduled with the students who agreed to take part.

In the next section, I will discuss the results and analyse them using content analysis. The results are the first implementation of the EDR process. This means that the following results helped me refine my process and implement the second iteration of the course.

4.3 Results and Analysis of Implementation I: Key Findings

To answer the research question, I will discuss here the responses collected from the participants in the form of reflections, observations, and interviews were conducted before and after the course IEDU0010. The interviews were conducted one month after the course ended with the participants who agreed to do face-to-face interviews. The recorded interviews were then transcribed. The purpose of these interviews was to see if the participants kept using their newly learned skills in other classes, in their workplaces or elsewhere. Another goal was to remind them one more time to start practising their super skills if they had not done so yet. The content analysis methodology was applied to student reflections, feedback, observational notes, and student interviews. The key findings will be discussed for each super skill separately.

4.3.1 Key Findings: Communication Skills in Phase I

Communication skills enhancement for students happened during group sharing, ideation, suggestions, and general discussions before and after tasks. Thus, tasks, reflections, feedback and general group work were different methods participants used to communicate among themselves to practise and enhance their communication skills. Reflections helped the students discuss and share their experiences and as a result, they managed to learn from each other. The feedback helped them understand and accept ideas and suggestions from each other. Experiential learning occurs when students learn from each other through reflections and feedback discussions.

During Phase I, the enhancement of communication skills among students using content analysis appeared in the following main categories of findings: *reflection and feedback, active participation and sharing, listening, inclusion, practice, building trust, atmosphere, and ideation*. This means that these are the categories that helped the students practice their communication skills.

First, *reflection and feedback* were perceived among teammates as essential learning skills to be able to communicate effectively in class. Reflection helped the students think about their learning at first and then share it with others, first in pairs and then in groups. The paper clip activity is an example of how the reflection process should be understood. This activity shows how ideas are generated. By spending time thinking of new ways of using paper clips and sharing these ways afterwards with others, one can come up with new ideas since the ideas are being built on the ideas of others. Similarly, when the students were performing tasks and then doing individual reflections, they were coming up with new ideas and discussion topics to communicate with each other upon sharing. Therefore, by using reflection, the students were able to come up with things to say to each other and learn from their discussions.

Feedback did the same thing: i.e., helped the students build an environment where they could communicate with ease. By sharing positive feedback, the students learned to communicate better. As a result of hearing positive encouragement from their peers' feedback, the morale of the participants to continue working together was enhanced. Furthermore, reflection and feedback also helped the students have an experience that they then implemented in the next task. Following are a few statements from the students on the importance of reflection and feedback for their communication skills enhancement.

S1 realized the importance of continuous feedback stating that she would use feedback as often as possible. Furthermore, on the importance of reflection and learning from reflections, she stated that the learning she got from one reflection would then be implemented in the next work she was involved in.

> *I will try to recall the learning in future projects before I act and not afterwards in a reflection (S1).*

This shows that the student was learning from reflection and feedback, and that, due to this learning that she was getting, she was continuously sharing her ideas

and thoughts. This continuous sharing also helped her practice her communication skills.

Similarly, S2 also discussed the importance of giving and receiving feedback. She learned her mistakes from the constructive feedback given to her by S1 and she realized that she should also start to give positive feedback to others, so that others could benefit from her feedback:

> *Not to miss giving positive feedback (S2).*

Furthermore, S7 added that feedback should be given on time and that feedback should only be given on the topic of discussion;

> *Feedback is valuable when it is given timely and appropriate to the situation at hand (S7).*

Here the students mention different ways feedback can be given. This is something I discussed with the students on workshop days, and they remembered some of the ways. Since they mentioned some of the ways of giving and receiving feedback, I believe they understood the value of feedback in enhancing communication skills.

On reflection, S7 commented: 'I feel good in the group that I can share my ideas and be open.'

The students highlighted the significance of using reflection and feedback to enhance their communication skills. Reflection helped the students share their learning, and feedback created a positive environment. By sharing their learning and by giving feedback, students felt comfortable communicating, hence improving their communication skills. This enhancement of communication skills can be seen in the student comments quoted above.

The students also enhanced their communication skills through *active participation and sharing.* Tasks and activities that were followed by discussions, reflections and feedback all encouraged the students to actively participate, share their ideas and learn from each other. The tasks provided the initial content for discussion and a way to participate. Reflections and feedback helped the students come up with new shared and individualized learning. The following examples are drawn from student reflection, feedback, and my observational notes showing that the students enhanced their communication skills through active participation and sharing.

Both S1 and S2 shared that they solved communication problems by just sharing and not judging each other's ideas and suggestions, instead having discussions to understand each other's ideas and suggestions before making decisions. Judging occurs when one person says something, and the others start to argue immediately and do not understand the first person. Instead, S1 and S2 preferred to have a conversation about the issues that arose during the sharing and ideation phases. Active participation was also made possible because of the ease of asking questions and expressing one's opinions/suggestions/ideas without judgment. This was made possible due to the practice students did during workshop days. By actively participating, S5 felt good about her work:

I asked questions if I did not understand and I actively participated in the group work, which feels good (S5).

Some students – S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, and S10 – said that active participation and sharing were difficult because of disagreements with others. One solution that S4, S5, S6, and S8 came up with was to ask questions of members who were not participating but only disagreeing with the ideas and suggestions of others. Just letting everyone speak and share solved most of the disagreements immediately. Those who were not participating even after the given time felt that they were wasting their group's time and strove to work on their issues and get involved in the conversations. Furthermore, S3 said that working in a new group with members from different regions, countries and cultures, as well as of ages, was a rather strange experience. By the second day (during workshop days) after going through lots of reflections, feedback, learning from others, and observing growth S3 was not only starting conversations with others but also inviting others to share their thoughts. Similarly, S4 and S8 were having some difficulties in communicating their thoughts during the first three days of workshops.

S10 reflected that the lack of participation would be harmful to the productivity of the group. Thus, she strove to work hard to overcome her lack of listening skills so that she could actively participate. S8, on the other hand, wanted the other members in the group to take the lead and not just listen to her ideas and accept them. She wanted some communication and ideas from other members as well. She wanted to practise her communication skills through listening, but she was not able to do so when her teammates kept quiet in group meetings.

It turned out that active participation and sharing helped the students enhance their communication skills during the course. The students did this by engaging in discussions, reflections, and feedback sessions. This helped them to work together to come up with solutions to the problems they were facing. They learned to ask questions and were not afraid of being judged in the process of doing so. Overall, the students can be divided into two groups: those who actively participated and shared from the start, and those who kept quiet at first, then realized the importance of sharing through the discussions and were also reminded by teammates to share their ideas and thoughts and finally participated actively and shared, which ultimately improved the communication skills of the participants.

Thirdly, *listening* was mentioned as an important part of learning communication skills by all the students. According to the students, skilled communication means listening more and speaking less. The students started to enhance their communication skills by listening after working together on the tasks during the first three workshop days, and they continued this trend during their project work. Tasks such as Lost at Sea and Creating Evaluations are two good examples of learning through listening. In the Lost at Sea task, the students worked individually as well as in groups. During the group work stage of the task, they could only go forward

if all the students agreed on the solution. Thus, agreement could only happen through listening and agreeing. In tasks like Lost at Sea, many important lessons were discussed such as the importance of listening to one another without judgment or argument, thinking before speaking *i.e.*, preparing beforehand for the task, and ideation. All these important learning outcomes helped the students the most in understanding the importance of listening. For example, S1 and S2 both shared that they solved problems by just listening to each other's suggestions and not judging ideas/solutions, instead having a conversation about the issue at hand:

> *It was important for us to listen carefully and actively. After listening to each other we evaluated and found a solution together. We always treated each other equally (S1 & S2).*

Sometimes students played it safe by keeping quiet at first and just listening to gather information. However, a lack of participation can lead to trust issues, which happened to S4 during the course. There was a struggle but, in the end, it did not prevent him or his group members, such as S8, from listening to others and moving forward:

> *I had a problem with my focus and listening to my group in the first two meetings. I am having issues with communicating and listening skills in the group work and I need to work on them (S4).*

The students understood that listening more and speaking less is an effective means of communication. They understood this from the tasks and activities such as Lost at Sea and creating evaluations. These tasks allowed the students to practise listening to agree on solutions before moving ahead. The students learned not to judge others and to think before speaking by practising listening. They mentioned that they solved the problems they faced during tasks and activities by actively listening to one another's ideas, suggestions, and conversations. A few students, such as S8, who kept quiet at first and focused only on listening soon realized that just listening and not sharing could lead to mistrust. She acknowledged the need to work on her sharing and listening skills. Overall, focusing on listening helped the students enhance their communication skills.

Inclusion is the next main finding that enhanced communication skills, according to the students. Inclusion simply means including other members of the group in conversations before decisions are made. Tasks such as Lost at Sea helped the students understand inclusion, too. This task was divided into two phases: working individually and working in a team. Seeing the results of not surviving individually but surviving as a group helped the students realize the importance of including others and taking advantage of their strengths and skills. Some students, such as S8, had some issues at first to communicate and include others in their communication. At first, S8 was scared to even ask questions because of fear of judgment from others. Later in the course she was able to communicate and developed the courage to include others in her conversations and even encouraged others to ask questions.

The hardest part for S8 was to invite and encourage others to participate:

> *I am scared to ask questions and repeatedly ask questions if I don't understand their ideas. I think I can slow down and calm myself down. Moreover, I can ask them to speak their opinion more than once (S8).*

Accepting the opinion of another person was also something with which students such as S6 struggled. Similarly, when S3 noticed that students in his group were keeping to themselves and were not giving their input, he encouraged them to speak:

> *I ask other members of the group who are quiet to give their input (S3).*

A few students found it easy to include others, and a few found it a bit of a task to include or care about others. S6 and S11 said they understood why it is important to make important decisions together. In their interviews, S6 and S11 said that they started working with people they had never met before. It was hard for S6 to listen and approach others. For S11, on the other hand, it was not difficult to approach and include others in his conversations.

Seeing how some students found it difficult to include others, while at the same time seeing students include others in their conversations makes it easy to understand the importance of inclusion. According to the students, tasks and activities also enhanced communication skills using inclusion. The task Lost at Sea showed the students the benefits of teamwork and using each other's strengths. A few students at first struggled to communicate and include others, but soon after working through tasks such as Lost at Sea, they overcame their fears and started including others in their discussions. Overall, the stress on inclusion encouraged the students to improve their communication skills.

Five students discussed *practice* as an important strategy to enhance communication skills. Here *practice* means repeating something to learn it. The students practised by having discussions, writing reflections and sharing repeatedly, and giving and receiving feedback. The models that were introduced during the course also helped the students practice. The Divergent-Explore-Convergent model was used many times during ideation phases such as during the Paperclip task and project ideation phase. The Learning Spiral method, which was used to help the students understand experiential learning, also helped them understand the importance of practicing. Another method that is important to mention is the 4Rs method used for reflection. The students used this 4Rs method of reflection to practise reflection, which, in turn, helped them enhance their communication skills when they shared their reflections. By practising different methods, the students were able to have conversations during tasks, activities, and project work. The following are a few of the reflections showing that the students understood the importance of practice in enhancing communication skills.

In her interview, S8 discussed practice: 'It prepares my thoughts in advance, and I practice them before I say anything in group work'. Concluding her thoughts on practice she said, 'I think I can improve it with practice'. S10 was another student

who was intrigued with the learning and practice combination of this workshop-based course. She saw the importance of practice and learning from others. In her reflection, she said that learning from others and collaborating in different teams would help her get along and secure future job opportunities. For S10 the best way forward was practicing repeatedly and learning from her reflections and experiences.

A key finding of the research was that practice played an important role in the enhancement of communication skills of the participating students. The students were able to enhance their communication skills through discussions, reflective and feedback sessions after tasks and activities. Furthermore, the use of models also helped the students practice. Models like Divergent-Explore-Convergent, the Learning Spiral method and the 4Rs Reflection model all helped the students practice. By taking part in various practice methods, the students were able to improve their ability to have conversations during tasks and project work. Through this practice, they were able to prepare their thoughts in advance, learn from others, and gain valuable experience, which ultimately helped enhance the communication skills of the students who participated in the course.

Four students mentioned the importance of *building trust* for better communication skills. They recognized the importance of building trust from the very start of the course and that is why building trust ended up as an important main skill in enhancing communication skills.

From the start of the course, I gave full autonomy to the students. I did so by creating the most important part of the course with the help of the students. The evaluation questions that I used to evaluate the performance of the students were made by the students themselves. Furthermore, I tried to build a trusting environment by encouraging students to take leadership roles and made sure they understood that they were responsible as leaders for the day-to-day activities of the groups they were leading. Lastly, as leaders or members, the responsibility for their final project was all theirs from the start to the finish. Giving this much autonomy to the students helped them see that I trusted them, and they started to build trust among themselves as well during the course. With the help of tasks and activities such as Lost at Sea and the (creative) Introductions activity the students were able to understand the importance of trusting in the abilities of others. Together with the autonomy I gave them and the assigned tasks and activities, the students managed to build a trusting environment where they worked to complete their individual and group tasks and project work.

Most of the students in the course built their trust gradually, which is normal behaviour in any new group, according to the IMGD model. Students usually take some time to get to know other students; thus, trust-building happens slowly. This is evident from S5's reflection during the course:

> *At first, I struggled with communication and leadership skills but now in this course, I feel safe in communicating (S5).*

S4 and S8 also had trust issues due to a lack of sharing in their group at the beginning. S4 was not communicating, and S8 felt that she was the only one in the group who was contributing. Hence these two built distrust between them and as a result in their group as well. Both decided to give time and listen to others so that they could build trust and create a better working atmosphere in their group. S8 concluded:

> *I would like to focus on building trust first through communication and then work on other matters when it comes to working with new people (S8).*

Trust was established among students through the autonomy that was given to them throughout the course. This trust building via autonomy allowed the students to open communication, and collaboration gave them shared responsibility in completing their tasks and project work. Trust was built gradually, and over time it created an environment where communication and the sharing of ideas occurred safely. Moreover, trust issues, when they occurred, were addressed by listening to each other. Building trust among the students facilitated better teamwork, cooperation, and a positive working atmosphere, according to the students. Overall, building trust slowly helped the students enhance their communication skills.

Atmosphere was discussed as an important part of enhancing communication skills by almost all the students. Atmosphere means creating an environment where students feel safe to open up and say what they truly think about the topic at hand and know that others are listening without judgment. Apart from tasks and activities, one model that helped the students create a better working atmosphere was the IMGD model. The conversation that I had on different stages of group development in the IMGD model helped to create atmospheres based on the stage groups were in at the time. At the beginning, the groups were in Stage 1: a stage that is not easy to be in because lots of people take leadership roles, which leads to chaos erupting. However, in Stage 3 and onwards, there is generally a different atmosphere. By understanding this difference in working in different atmospheres, the students knew how to handle themselves in any such situation. By the time this conversation on atmosphere started, the students already understood the importance of sharing, participation, and building trust. Therefore, it became easy for the students to understand and recognize the importance of atmosphere and to use it to enhance their communication skills, which can be seen in their reflections discussed in the following paragraphs.

Student S5, who felt difficulty at first in communicating with others, appreciated the atmosphere of the class, which helped her to open up and participate in group discussions. The atmosphere also helped her feel safe and not judged whenever she spoke in her group. This helped build her trust and gave her confidence in sharing and communicating her ideas, and her performance increased as a result:

> *I feel nervous in pressure situations, but in the end I felt better. I should work more on my confidence and sharing ideas with others without the fear that my idea is bad (S5).*

Many students, including S1, S2, S7, and S8, who used reflection and feedback constantly during their group discussions, were able to keep the atmosphere of the class positive, which can be seen in S1's comment:

> *By using reflection and feedback we are more aware of how to phrase comments and especially how to face feedback to be able to keep the atmosphere of the group better and not take feedback personally (S1).*

A positive atmosphere that specifically focused on safety, no judgment, and open communication enhanced the communication skills of the participating students. Furthermore, models such as IMGD helped the students understand how they could navigate in different situations. Providing tools and having discussions on the importance of a positive atmosphere in the class helped the students feel safe and have the confidence to work freely on their tasks and project work. The positive atmosphere led the students to improve their communication skills.

The last important finding was that *ideation* enhanced communication skills: specifically, accepting others' ideas and then combining them to come up with better ideas. Tasks such as the Apple Task and Lost at Sea are two good examples which helped students enhance their communication skills. Building upon the ideas of others was one of the first concepts discussed on Day 1. The Apple Task helped the students understand verbal and non-verbal communication; it also helped the students understand that they could build upon the ideas of others. Working on ideation helped the students communicate with each other, and in the process of doing so their communication skills improved.

Here are a few instances of reflections that show how ideation helped improve the communication skills of the students. Similar to listening, almost all the students mentioned the importance of ideation. S4, S6, and S7 discussed the importance of small ideas and compromises. A reflection by S6 shows how he changed his mind about the opinions and ideas of others:

> *I learned today to listen to others and combine my ideas with the ideas of others. Usually, I used to fight with others, that they have a different idea than mine and my idea is better. But today It was different I accepted others' ideas and explained my ideas and came up with better solutions (S6).*

Giving time and space to others was the key lesson learned. As the students moved forward in the course, they understood the importance of sharing ideas and listening to other's ideas. Some of those who did not share from the beginning, like S4, started to share their ideas and opinions as they witnessed the importance of idea-sharing and the ease with which the communication was happening among those who shared their ideas. Thus, S4 shared the importance of idea-sharing:

> *I need to express my opinions and ideas more (S4).*

S4 saw the importance of sharing ideas and wanted to share his ideas so that his participation, along with that of the others, would help their group work.

From the very first day students quickly understood the importance of ideas,

generating new ideas, and combining ideas with each other to come up with even better ideas. The tasks and activities helped the students understand ideation. Their willingness to share ideas gradually improved throughout the course, which can be seen in their comments showing that they had realized that sharing ideas led to better outcomes. Thus, the process of ideation which happened over and over helped the students enhance their communication skills.

To conclude, several key findings – reflection, feedback, active participation, listening, inclusion, practice, trust-building, a positive atmosphere, and ideation – were identified as factors that contributed towards enhancing the communication skills of the students during the course. These factors allowed the students to create a positive environment and develop problem-solving skills, encouraged thoughtful sharing, and helped the students identify the strengths of others. Almost unanimously the students perceived communication skills as an important soft skill to learn. This supports the study by Kinash and Crane (2016) which suggests placing communication above the other super skills. Furthermore, from my observations, the participants' reflections, feedback, and the interviews, it was clear that every participant understood the importance of communication skills, and almost all of them gave examples of situations where they would use their newly learned communication skills in future. Overall, the important lessons the students learned helped them practice and enhance their communication skills.

4.3.2 Key Findings: Motivation and Initiative Skills in Phase I

The motivation and initiative skills of the students on both the individual and group levels were enhanced using tasks, reflections, feedback, and discussions following the tasks. The IMGD levels of group development played a significant role in raising the students' will to reach higher levels of IMGD stages. The students worked together in teams during their workshop days as well as during their project work to reach the higher IMGD stages, and in doing so they practised their motivation skills. Similarly, when the students took on leadership roles to practise leadership skills on their own, they managed to enhance their initiative skills. Another way they enhanced their leadership skills was through encouraging their teammates in their group work to collaborate and share. Furthermore, student motivation and initiative skills improved after process meetings when we met to listen to their progress (or lack thereof) in taking up leadership roles and working as members. This is because during the meetings, the students discussed their process journey with me. This discussion led to insights through which they realized the importance of working hard and encouraging others to do the same, and one way this could be done was through self-motivation and taking initiative. By realizing the importance of motivation and initiative abilities, the students managed to practise their motivation and initiative skills, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

During Phase I, through the content analysis, the main findings (categories) that enhanced the motivation and initiative skills of the students were *Experiential learning, Preparation, Participation, Cooperation, and Acceptance*. Furthermore, by doing content analysis I was able to discern three recurring themes for each workshop day. The main theme of Day 1 can be summarized as a day of *learning* from each other to improve soft skills. On Day 2, the students were mostly discussing themes related to *participation* among themselves. This shows the openness with which they included and listened to others and motivated each other to achieve higher levels of group development stages. On Day 3 the students were discussing *preparation* for the final project. This showed me that they were getting ready and motivated to start on the project work that was their main goal for the rest of the course.

Coming back to categories, my first main finding was that *Experiential Learning* was perceived as an essential skill to improve skills of motivation and taking initiative by seven students. Experiences that are learned through practice, reflection, feedback, and discussions with others are experiential learning. The tasks in which the students participated during the workshop days all helped the students to learn and implement their experiential learning. For example, learning from the first task was implemented in the following task and so on. Experiential learning helped the students practice motivation and initiative skills because learning happened after they shared their reflections and received feedback from others after each task and activity. The positive feedback increased the students' motivation, and this increased motivation helped them take initiative on their own the next time they met for group work or an activity. This cycle of constant feedback and learning experiences helped the students practice skills of motivation and taking initiative, and the process of doing so repeatedly increased the students' motivation and initiative skills.

The following are examples of instances where the students recognized their experiential learning.

S6 realized that he was missing out on learning just because he did not pay attention to the comments and suggestions of others; due to his reflection and sharing with others, he began to pay attention to the experiences he gained from the various lessons he learned about his work in the class: 'I learnt about myself to think about the things that I see every day but do not focus on them.' He continued by stating that reflection and sharing enhance experiential learning. Like S6, S1 stated that she gained new experiences after every task she did in her group:

> *I have reached a new stage in group work as we continuously work together on tasks, raise more concerns and ask more questions (S1).*

S2 further discussed her experience of working in a group and going through the journey and the learning that takes place within to describe her experiential learning:

> *I appreciate now more the dynamics of interdisciplinary projects since the different approaches enrich the process and make the outcome more interesting and unique (S2).*

Another student, S7, mentioned that she was happy that she was '*learning something new and important for life in every class'*. Furthermore, learning was not happening in the present only; the students were also thinking about the future use of their learning in different scenarios. S5 and S8 said that they would use their experiences in future and discussed with me what to avoid in future as well:

> *I will use my learning when I work in school as I will make sure that everyone speaks, even the quiet ones, and that everyone understands each other (S5).*
> *I will use what I learned today in future school assignments to minimize frustration and annoyance among team members and improve the outcomes (S8).*

S5 saw that experiential learning happens when everyone participates, and that is what motivated her to plan her future teaching strategies. On the contrary, S8 went through a bit of a tough time, as can be seen from her comment, and she reflected on her experiential learning by stating that she would avoid similar frustrating situations by doing more listening.

Tasks such as the Apple Task, like reflections and discussions, also helped students in their experiential learning, as mentioned by S4 and S8 in their comments:

> *I was not going anywhere [;] I was lost and then I got ideas from team members (S4).*
> *When I saw the others coming up with other ideas like text, the names in different languages etc. I could feel my brain being flooded with new ideas (S8).*

In short, experiential learning enhanced the students' motivation and initiative skills by allowing them to witness the benefits of their learning experiences through increased attention and focus on the part of other students (in the case of S6), applying their learning experiences in the classroom through reflection and sharing (as mentioned by S2 and S4) and idea generation (S4 and S8), collaboration through projects (mentioned by S1 and S2), and carrying them forward into the future (mentioned by S5, S7, and S8). Through repeated implementation of the positive feedback received, and through reflection, the students were continually motivated to take initiative, thus consistently practicing and refining their motivation and initiative skills, leading to continuous growth and development during the course.

The next key finding was that being *prepared* helped the students enhance their motivation and initiative skills during the course. During the first three days, the students followed my instructions and were prepared to work on the given tasks. During this time, they realized the importance of coming prepared, and they did that because their willingness to participate in the workshops is evident as there was not a single day when someone did not attend the class. It was only during the project work time that the students understood even more the importance of coming prepared because suddenly it was their job to start and finish the whole project and act as leaders and members to implement their learning from the workshop days. During this time, it was their duty to take leadership roles, do check-

in and check-out, distribute roles, and conduct reflection and feedback sessions, to implement everything that they practised during the workshop days. Thus, when the project work started, and everyone had a role in the group, all of them knew they should be prepared and ready to discuss and present their work and move forward. Understanding the importance of being prepared and then doing so during the project work helped the students enhance their motivation and initiative skills. Following are a few sample reflections from students in the different stages of their individual and group work journey.

Student S2 learned to write down notes and not just trust her memory. In her group meeting, she discussed an idea for her research. The other members of the group misunderstood what she said and went in a different direction. As a result, when they met a week later, both had worked on different ideas and then they had to discard a week's worth of work and start again. Time was lost but they understood an important lesson about preparation. Therefore, S2 decided to keep notes of the meetings and work according to them:

> *Write everything down during the discussion to be able to remember what the other person has said and make better decisions (S2).*

Furthermore, two students, S5 and S7, also agreed on the importance of preparing and doing proper research beforehand: '*I also learned that I need to research before I do anything*' (S7). Similarly, S5 suggested that at least one person should take the initiative of doing research beforehand. In one of her group's meetings, there was an issue concerning research as no one had prepared any notes or was knowledgeable on the topic at hand, hence the following comment:

Today's exercise teaches me the importance of researching any given topic. It helps if at least one person should be able to be knowledgeable in the group (S5).

Lastly, the students agreed that being prepared for group work would create a better working atmosphere and improve the group dynamics in the present and the future. S1 was prepared to use her learning from this course and implement it in future group work:

> *I will try to recall the learning in future projects before I act and not afterwards in a reflection (S1).*

She said she does not want to just learn from reflections. She wants to implement her learning and gain new experiences, and she is prepared to do what she needs to do.

In short, being prepared enabled the students to take ownership of their actions. They assumed leadership roles to manage their groups, communicating effectively both as leader and member during project work, collaborating efficiently on their individual and group tasks, and acquiring knowledge through research and sharing it through reflections with others to gain experiential learning. Furthermore, the students learned from their past experiences and created a positive working atmosphere. These factors collectively enhanced the motivation and initiative skills

of the participating students during the course, leading to more successful outcomes and personal growth.

However, being prepared is not enough if participation in a group is lacking. *Participation* is the next main finding (factor) discussed by four students to learn and enhance their motivation and initiative skills. Participation means working in groups and giving full attention to the work at hand. Discussions and tasks such as Survival at Sea clarified the importance of participation. The Survival at Sea task helped the students see for themselves that they could survive if everyone participated and listened to one another. Here is what S3 said about participation:

> *I will take the initiative by making suggestions to the group and participating in the decision-making process (S3).*

S3 was excited to survive in the Lost at Sea task, and he was so motivated afterwards that he reflected that he would take more initiative in communicating his thoughts and suggestions in future group work. He further stated that he would take part in decision-making processes as well. It is important to mention here that S3 introduced himself as an introvert, and his reflection shows his excitement after surviving at sea because of the group working together. Like S3, S11 enhanced his motivation and initiative skills with the help of participation (finding):

> *Listening to others is making me participate actively and my collaboration skills are improving (S11).*

S8, who had difficulties in her group, as discussed in the communication section earlier, was motivated to keep working with her group as she also saw the effectiveness of participation:

> *Today I learned how to effectively work in a group while taking everyone's input into account (S8).*

Participation was also difficult for S1, who reflected on selecting topic ideas for project work:

> *I feel like we both had different ideas of how to do this project. We had trouble finding out right away how to start but overcame them by sharing how we envisioned things (S1).*

Participation turned out to be a somewhat difficult task for the introverted students in the course. It was only due to their experiential learning and seeing the benefits of participation that was happening in front of their eyes that the introverts came out of their comfort zones and participated in group work. They did so to enhance their learning and took the initiative to participate and help their teammates learn as well.

In short, participation promoted active engagement and contribution for students such as S3 and S11 to enhance their motivation and initiative skills. The participation also promoted collaboration and communication opportunities for students such as S8 and S11. Participation helped these students in overcoming challenges, idea generation, and personal growth. By actively participating in group work during

workshop days and especially during the project work, these students were able to enhance their motivation and initiative skills, develop effective communication strategies, and contribute to a more productive and cohesive learning environment.

The next enhancement in motivation and initiative skills of the students came from *Cooperation,* which was mentioned by six students as a main source of enhancing their motivation and taking initiative skills. The tasks and activities that were used during the course helped the students understand the importance of cooperation. Working together, listening to one another, trusting in one another, and learning from one another are what the students meant by *cooperation*. Following are a few reflections by students on cooperation:

> *I tried to incorporate what S2 said, as much as it made sense to me and share my perspective on my decisions and ideas (S1).*
>
> *I got to know the importance of trusting each other's expertise (S2).*

S1 and S2 were working on building trust to be able to cooperate better. They did that by listening to each other without judgment and making sense of the conversations. They found out each other's expertise through the Introduction task, which helped them assign roles among themselves and move forward with the group work and later with project work. Furthermore, S5, who was afraid of being judged, avoided it by cooperation in the form of sharing and standing by her shared thoughts. S7, who was not afraid of the judgment of others, also reflected that to express oneself freely one must be able to learn to cooperate first. S11 appreciated that his group helped him move forward any time he felt lost or behind:

> *I should work more on my confidence and sharing ideas with others without the fear that my idea is bad (S5).*
>
> *I learnt to cooperate with everybody and to express myself (S7).*
>
> *I was lost but with my peers' help, I moved forward (S11).*

After three workshop days, it was clear to the class that the progress of a group depends on the full involvement of the team members. This involvement could only happen through trust and listening to one another, as mentioned by the students. The students practised listening and built trust, which is why the comments above by S1, S2, S5, S7, and S11 are so important.

In short, cooperation promoted trust and mutual understanding (S1 and S2), and a supportive environment (S11). It enabled individuals to overcome their fear of judgment (S5), express themselves confidently (S7), seek and provide support (S11), and actively engage with others' ideas (S1, S2, S5 and S11). By embracing cooperation, the students enhanced their motivation and initiative skills, leading to collaborative success and personal development during the course.

A final important finding in the research was that *acceptance* is the main factor in enhancing motivation and initiative skills discussed by the students. Students who felt judged or did not trust others at first, who did not share at first, or who were simply introverts agreed to work and share in their groups upon realizing that their

thoughts and ideas were welcomed and accepted by others. In the beginning most of the students were not giving importance to the ideas and suggestions of others. Due to this, many students kept quiet, and a very few outspoken students were leading most of the conversations. As a result, the performance of the groups was not at 100% because not everyone was participating. All the tasks and activities from the workshop days in which there was lots of discussion and sharing helped the students start to accept each other, which, in turn, enhanced their motivation and initiative skills. Students who were not sharing got motivated to share, and those who were sharing saw that they helped others to share and thus were also motivated to share more in future.

Some of the students put their own opinions aside to listen to others, as stated by S2:

> *I understand that it is necessary to put your opinions aside if there are good arguments from other members of a group for better results (S2).*

Those who were shy, afraid of being judged, or just keeping to themselves accepted that by not sharing, they were making it difficult for their groups to move ahead, as in the case of S7:

> *I am starting to be not as shy as I was at the beginning of this course. I was afraid of being judged by my opinions. Now I know that I can share my ideas freely without any judgment (S7).*

As soon as students like S7 understood that they were not being judged for their ideas and suggestions and that they were accepted by others, the conversations moved ahead in the groups freely and ideas came into the discussions frequently. Finally, some students understood that even small ideas can benefit everyone greatly, as in the case of S6:

> *I have never thought of thinking about small things. Now I know that every small idea is important (S6).*

In short, acceptance created a supportive environment where the students felt comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions. Acceptance encouraged active participation among members of the groups to foster the acceptance of diverse viewpoints (S2). By promoting acceptance, students' motivation and initiative skills were enhanced, leading to improved group dynamics.

To conclude, the factors that enhanced the growth of motivation and initiative skills identified by the students were experiential learning, being prepared, participation, cooperation, and acceptance. These key findings promoted engagement, collaboration, a supportive and trusting atmosphere, and improved the group dynamics of the participants, which ultimately helped enhance the motivation and initiative skills of these students.

4.3.3 Key Findings: Leadership Skills in Phase 1

Leadership skill refers to the abilities that enable a leader to perform their roles effectively (Crane, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2022). The leadership skills practice started on Day 1 with the creative introductory task. In this task, the students discussed their strengths and weaknesses among themselves. The purpose of the task was to let the students figure out each other's abilities that they could use them in future. By the time the students were asked to lead their groups to practise leadership skills (Day 3), they were already familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of each other, thus making it easy for acting leaders to assign roles to members for specific tasks and activities to finish their project work.

Any new group will require a leader according to the IMGD model of group development. My students also needed a leader when they started their project work: a leader who could help them navigate their tasks and assign them their roles. This need came up as soon as I let the students make decisions (project work starting on Day 3). There are two examples of students who discussed the need for a leader in the early stages of group work. Students S3 and S10 were working on different tasks, and they needed help in understanding tasks, dividing roles, and. in general, needed someone who could guide them towards the next steps:

> *I learned today that there should be a leader in the group who organizes people to work towards a shared goal but when we started discussion in the group there was no leadership (S3).*
>
> *I learned today that we need to have a leader in a group. In the Lost at Sea task, no one was able to lead us, and we followed each other's ideas and feelings. I need a leader at the start of a group project that can guide me. Without that, I feel lost (S10).*

In short, to learn and practice leadership skills, students must first identify the need for a leader. By knowing when and why a leader is needed, individuals can effectively step into leadership roles and provide the necessary guidance and support to achieve collective goals. This need for a leader in the early stages of group work also aligns with Susan Wheelan's IMGD model, where participants need a leader in the first stage, but this need fades away by the time groups reach higher levels in the IMGD model.

Understanding, listening, growth, and taking charge are, therefore, the main findings in the leadership skill category that I derived from the content analysis of the student reflections, feedback, interviews, and my observation notes. Each main finding is discussed next to analyse and to find out its impact on students' leadership skills enhancement.

Firstly, students' *understanding* of the importance of learning leadership skills came during the workshop days. Tasks such as Lost at Sea helped the students understand the importance of a leader who can help the rest in navigating discussions, is good at managing arguments, can listen to everyone to make final decisions, and move

the conversation forward. The whole class worked on the Lost at Sea task as one group. This meant that all the students had to agree at first and only then could they move ahead to finish the task. There was a time limit as well. The group needed a leader who could stop the chaotic conversation, keep the conversation moving, keep an eye on the time, and deliver the result. This was the first task where students understood the importance of having leadership skills to manage large groups and work on finding solutions.

Some of the students found it intriguing to become leaders and reflected on the skills they must have to become one. In the case of S5, she understood that to have good leadership skills she must focus on listening and sharing. She stated that her leadership skills were practised better when she listened to the people she was working with:

> *I found out the skills (sharing, listening) I need to work more to be a good leader so I can be better (S5).*

All the students were asked to practise leadership skills one by one during the project work. It was up to them to decide who they wanted to lead on any given day, and they were asked to choose the leader according to the need and experience required at that time. The students identified each other's weaknesses and strengths based on the tasks and activities of each workshop day and based on that information chose their leaders for the project workdays. Figuring out each other's strengths and weaknesses and their own helped the students understand when it was a suitable time to take on a leadership role, as can be seen from the reflection of S2:

> *I learned when it is appropriate for me to be the leader. And when I personally and the whole group can benefit when somebody else is a leader (S2).*

Finally, the students understood that motivation is another way of practising leadership skills. A leader is a person who knows how to motivate people under his or her leadership and improve their skills, as reflected by S10:

> *I learned how a good leader should act to motivate and to see the other members of the group as a big family to improve their skills (S10).*

In short, students understood the important leadership skills which allowed them to develop their competencies. The competencies the students understood were effective communication, decision-making, self-awareness, and motivation, all of which are important for enhancing their leadership skills.

The second main finding many students discussed as important in enhancing their leadership skills is the importance of *listening*. How does listening enhance leadership skills? Often in group discussions, there is a situation where few people listen to what other people say, which can lead to arguments, and this is not what we are discussing here. Arguments are sometime good to have but here I am suggesting that listen to understand is better and this type of listening is what I am discussing. From the very beginning on Day 1, the students introduced the three most important skills that they could offer to help others. In the same task, once the students had

discussed their skills, they were asked to pick another member of the group and tell the class about that person's skills. The point of this task was for them to start listening to understand others. This was the first introduction to the importance of listening. Thus, when I discussed leadership skills during workshop days, many students mentioned the importance of listening as an important skill for a leader to possess in the discussions. This is because a leader is a person who must know the skills of his/her team so that he/she can utilize their skills according to the situation at hand. A good leader must always know the strengths and weaknesses of his/her team and only then can he/she lead the team (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Students S6, S8, S9, and S11 discussed how listening to everyone else's ideas, taking input, and making decisions is what makes a person a better leader. These four students reflected on listening in almost the same terms. In discussing his leadership role, S6 said that he listened so that he was sure his plan was moving in the right direction and that he had the support of his team. S8 learned that she worked more effectively when she listened to her teammates' input. S11 described his experience of acting as a leader by stating that his decision-making improved because he listened to his group. The reflection of S9 can also sum up what the students learned about the importance of listening skills:

> *I learned that listening is an important leadership skill that helps to understand others' points of view (S9).*

In short, understanding and promoting decision-making, knowing how to utilize the strengths and weaknesses of team members, and creating a collaborative atmosphere by listening to others enhanced the leadership skills of the students.

Growth is the next main trait of a leader to enhance leadership skills, according to the data. Growth is used here in terms of personal growth and the growth of a group. The students mentioned personal growth in terms of leading the groups in their reflections. However, the growth of the team was not mentioned in their reflections. When I discussed the IMGD model, I was focusing on group growth. However, the students reflected on their personal growth and discussed their own personal leadership skills enhancement. It is an important distinction that the students used the IMGD model to enhance their skills such as leadership in the beginning.

Once the students had spent some time taking leadership roles, they started to talk about growth. Students S5, S8, S10, and S11 discussed growth. Some of them, like S5, had difficulty in the beginning taking the responsibilities of a leader: she learned to grow by taking her role as a job and doing what someone would do in a job. She acted as a leader and distributed roles, organized group work, and motivated the others when needed. S8 understood that leadership is something that we must do consciously and that it is does not happen by itself. S10 spent some time learning leadership skills from the class by observing how others led the group. She stated that a leader needs a strong personality to lead. Lastly, S11 summed up growth in leadership:

I have taken leadership roles several times in the group to challenge myself to learn the required skills and I feel right now I am not hesitant to lead any group regardless of the scope of the project (S11).

In short, growth turned out to be an important trait that enhanced the leadership skills of the students. The students managed to improve their skills because they were able to learn from others. They also managed to grow because they made an effort to develop themselves by overcoming their hesitations. Actively engaging in leadership roles during project work, challenging themselves, and observing the effective leadership practices of the other students enhanced the students' leadership skills.

Taking charge is the last trait of a leader that was discussed by three students, S3, S8, and S9, that enhanced their leadership skills. In this course, I had an opportunity to see students who acted as leaders from the very beginning, and I met the students who learned to lead. I observed how the leaders sometimes to give way to others in order to lead them, and how the non-leaders had to rise to the occasion and learn how to lead their groups. Everyone acted as both a leader and a team member and learned valuable lessons during the process from each other during the course. This practice of taking charge is how the students enhanced their leadership skills.

Here are two examples of students who did not want to lead and wanted someone else to take the role of leader. Students S3 and S9 said that they did not generally take a leading role, only doing so if no one else took charge:

I am not a volunteer when it comes to leading, I only take leadership roles when no one else is willing to take a lead in the group (combined statement of S3 and S9).

Student S8 wanted others to take the role of a leader. According to S8, a leader is a person who motivates and listens. Sometimes just listening to others is not enough; others must take the role of a leader themselves to become good leaders. That is why she wanted her group members to take turns leading the group and not just leave it to her to lead them:

I want other members of my group to take the role of a leader as I feel that I will not be able to motivate my group members by just listening to them as they do not share a lot and agree with me easily (S8).

In short, taking charge turned out to be a very important trait that enhanced the leadership skills of the students as it provided them with an opportunity for growth and learning. The students achieved this by taking leadership roles whether by choice or out of necessity. Practising leadership skills by taking charge helped in the enhancement of leadership skills in the collaborative learning environment that the students created throughout the course.

To conclude, this analysis of leadership skills has discussed several key findings of traits that enhanced the leadership skills of the students during the course. The key findings concerning leadership skills included the importance of understanding the

need for a leader, listening, growth, and taking charge. Firstly, the significance of understanding the need for a leader was understood when the students recognized the importance of having someone who could guide and organize group members towards a shared goal. Secondly, the importance of listening was emphasized during the course to practise leadership skills. The students did that by actively listening to each other in order to understand others' perspectives and utilize the strengths and weaknesses of the team members. Thirdly, the concept of growth, both in terms of personal growth and the growth of the team, was understood to be necessary for the enhancement of leadership skills. The students' growth occurred as they actively engaged in leadership roles, challenged themselves, and helped their fellow students learn from the experiences of others to enhance their leadership skills. Lastly, the practice of taking charge was emphasized, as the students found that assuming leadership roles, whether by choice or out of necessity, provided valuable learning opportunities and contributed to the overall enhancement of their leadership skills.

4.3.4 Summarizing the Key Findings in Phase I

During the first iteration of EDR, the students went through the process of learning super skills through practice. The basic tools used were tasks, reflection, feedback, and experiential learning discussions. Tasks were designed to provide content and the rest of the activities to provide support in discussions during the process. Table 5 below contains the key findings identified from the content analysis of the data gathered during and after the course. These findings contributed to the enhancement of students' communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership skills in Phase I.

Table 5 Key Findings for Fostering Super Skills in Phase I

Communication	Motivation and Initiative	Leadership
Reflection and feedback, Active participation, Listening, Inclusion, Practice, Trust-building, Positive atmosphere, and Ideation	Experiential learning, being Prepared, Participation, Cooperation, and Acceptance	Understanding, Listening, Growth, and Taking charge

The comments and reflections of the students during this phase show that the overall experience and learning of super skills was positively achieved, and the students showed a willingness to continue to improve their super skills in future. Student S11's final reflection at the end of the course on Day 6 i.e., presentation day, provides a suitable quotation to sum up the experience of the students:

Before the commencement of this course, I was far less clear about the required skills that led to an individual's success in work life. However, I have now grasped these essential skills through classroom collaboration and discussions, as well as group participation. I believed my contribution to the group had added value to accomplishing the task. It was an opportunity to work with peer students from Italy and Slovakia of different cultural backgrounds. I see lots of smiles on my peer students' faces just before we disperse (S11).

Like S11, many other students reflected and expressed that this was the first time they had practised or heard of employment super skills in a university setting. In the limited time that these students had, they all reflected on their improvement in learning super skills during the course. And their willingness to continue to practise and implement their newly learned skills in future shows their enhanced motivation. Leadership and communication skills are something that these students want to focus on more in future. In my observation and from listening to their conversations during interviews, I deduced that no one thinks that they have succeeded completely in learning the super skills in discussion. They all knew that it was only the beginning, and many students recognized that they had a long way to go.

4.4 Towards the Next Phase: Re-designing Needs

Out of all six course contact days, the two process meeting days (Days 4 and 5) were the ones that the students appreciated the most. This was the time they could come in and discuss what had gone well and solve issues related to group development that had come up during their group work and that they had not been able to solve by themselves. A few issues arose, and in the next iteration, a few changes were made to overcome those issues. What did not go well was there had not been enough focus on feedback practice sessions from the very beginning, taking responsibility, and differentiating process and content. Based on my experiences and analyses, four re-design needs emerged:

- Set aside more time for feedback,
- Focus on emphasizing responsibility for others,
- Make better clarifications between the process and the content of the course,
- The addition of the termination phase.

Set Aside More Time for Feedback

In the first iteration during the first three workshop days, students had only one feedback session. This resulted in less feedback given and received during project workdays among leaders and members. Therefore, in the next iteration, the course content was redesigned to allow more time for practice and feedback sessions in the class in my presence. This re-adjustment was done to create a safe environment where

the students could get more practice giving and receiving constructive feedback both as leaders and members. Overall, the course structure and contact days remained unchanged. The re-adjustment of adding more time for feedback addressed the first limitation in the following iteration.

Focus on Emphasizing Responsibility for Others.

In a group work setting, taking responsibility for one's work is essential. Without the equal effort of all members of a group, the group's work suffers. In the university setting, students mostly work alone and have responsibilities in terms of their studies. Thus, an important issue that arose during my course was when students had to take responsibility not only for their own work but also for the work of the whole group they represented. For example, if someone was late or did not come for group work, the other members or leader did not know if the missing student was coming to the class/group work or not. To increase the sense of responsibility among the students, I asked them to be aware of each member of their group. The issue came up during process meeting days Thus, during the project work group members and their leaders tried to take responsibility for others. The effort was visible, but it needed to be focused on more in the re-design for the next iteration from the beginning. Working on taking responsibility for others as early as possible also helps the groups advance in their group development stages of the IMGD model. Thus, in the next iteration, I determined that there would be more focus on responsibility.

The next need for re-design is the issue of understanding the difference between content and process and why we focus more on process.

Make Better Clarifications Between the Process and Content of the Course.

During process meeting days, the students showed confusion between process and content. During the process meetings, I wanted to ask about their group's journey (process). The students kept answering about their project work content. Some students, such as S6, were fully focused on content and missed the opportunity to work on processes during their project work. In the next re-design, I decided to focus more on explaining why we need to focus more on process and less on content from Day 1.

The Addition of Termination Phase

The final need for re-design is the addition of a termination phase. On the last day, after the presentations and the discussions were over, we were done, and the students left one by one. It felt as if something was missing, and after some reflection, I understood that there was a need for a proper way of finishing things off and this was where the termination phase should come in. In the next iteration, this phase was introduced so that the students had a proper end to the course. To put it simply, it was the final check-out.

5 EDR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE II

5.1 Description of the Setting

The second iteration of the course was conducted in 2020 in the Faculty of Education and Art & Design. Four students (S12-S15: two students from the Faculty of Arts and two from the Faculty of Education) enrolled in the course. The structure of the course remained the same than in Phase I, i.e., 6 working days in total: three days of workshops, two days for process meetings and a final day for presentations. The termination phase was also added to Day 6 as a necessary re-design based on the experiences in Phase I.

5.2 Description of the Implementation

The following section contains descriptions of each day's activities and the changes that took place on each day. Table 6 compares the changes that were made between the first and second iterations. The four re-design needs were taken into consideration for the second iteration. The implementation of the re-design needs occurred during the tasks and activities during the second iteration.

Day 1 – Implementation 2

Table 6 Day 1 in Phases I and II: Comparison

Day 1 – Phase I	Day 1 – Phase II
1. Introductions 2. Check-in 3. Apple Task 4. IMGD (brief verbal introduction) 5. Divergent-Convergent model (verbal introduction) 6. Reflection model 4Rs 7. Leadership slides 8. Check-out 9. One new word students had learned	1. Introductions 2. Check-in 3. Course objectives 4. Apple Task 5. Discussion of the difference between content and process 6. Reflection model 4Rs + practiced 7. IMGD (introduced in detail) 8. Leadership role during IMGD 9. Divergent-Explore-Convergent DEC, Assigned required reading material 10. No check-out

From the feedback that I received during Phase I, on Day 1 after the introductions and check-in, I made sure to spend a bit more time discussing the course objectives. Secondly, I added the discussion about the content and process model. I did this so that the students would know exactly what to focus more on during the course from the beginning: process. During Phase I on Day 1, I discussed only the 4Rs of the reflection model: the well of knowledge, but on Day 1 during Phase II, I made sure to set aside some time to practise reflection. The IMGD model and Divergent and Convergent models were verbally discussed in Phase I, but in Phase II these models were discussed using a few slides so the students would understand them better. Leadership was discussed in the previous phase on Day 1, but in Phase II I also discussed leadership roles regarding the IMGD model. Lastly, as much as I had wanted to have a feedback practice session on Day 1, I decided not to do it. I felt it was not necessary because there were only three participating students, and they were already reflecting and sharing their reflections. This sharing of reflections was a kind of feedback as they learned about their strengths and weaknesses while getting to know each other during the tasks and activities on Day 1. Therefore, I briefly introduced feedback through slides and discussed it in as much detail as possible. Lastly, while introducing tasks, reflection, and feedback, I made sure not to rush things and worry about time. Proper breaks were taken, and the students were given as much time and space as needed to finish the tasks and discussions.

Before I presented my slides to the students with the information on the topics at hand, the students were asked to conduct their research in group using the divergent-explore-convergent (DECM) model. This way of learning by doing allowed the students to work in their group and actively engage each other in conversations, and they understood that the information they expected to receive from their teachers on content could also be obtained through their own independent research and discussions. Thus, my objective of promoting independent learning habits in the students and helping them understand the advantages of working in groups and learning by doing was began effectively.

Finally, the faculties required me to give some reading material to the students, which I did, and the students returned their reflections using the 4Rs method at the end of the course. We did not do the check-out which I had planned to do on Day 1. The reason for not doing it is that there were only three students, and after going through all the material, tasks, reflections, and discussions, I decided that it was not necessary.

Day 2 – Implementation 2

The fourth student joined the class on Day 2. The students were given some time to help the fourth student understand what had happened on Day 1. After the brief orientation, the students started the day with check-in. In Phase II, the tasks and activities remained the same on Day 2 as in Phase I (see Table 7 below), but the

basics of facilitation were discussed after the check-in. There was a reflection after every task followed by discussions in Phase I, and in Phase II, after each task, I also asked the students to go in pairs and share their reflections before sharing them with the class. This way the students had a chance to learn from each other twice and learn something new and then share that experience with the rest of the class. Reflecting in pairs and learning new experiences is one of the main focuses of experiential learning. This way of reflecting helped the students to get to know the learning spiral in practice. I also set aside enough time for the students to give each other feedback. This was the first feedback day; therefore, the students were only allowed to give positive feedback.

Table 7 presents the comparison between the first and second iteration of the course on Day 2.

Table 7 Day 2 in Phases I and II: Comparison

Day 2 – Phase I	Day 2 – Phase II
1. Paper-clip task 2. Making guidelines/rules 3. Discussion of feedback 4. Content and Process model 5. Divergent-Convergent model discussed again 6. Experiential learning – the learning spiral 7. Basics of Facilitation 8. One new word students had learned	1. Check In 2. Basics of facilitation 3. Paperclip exercise 4. Making Guidelines/rules for evaluation 5. Slides on feedback slides and discussion 6. Experiential learning – the learning spiral 7. Beginning of leadership practice 8. IMGD stages 9. Reflection – written and shared 10. One new word students had learned 11. Check-out

Most of the tasks and activities remained the same with a few exceptions. Check-in was done. Feedback was discussed, and slides were added during this phase. Another minor change occurred in the way in which practising leadership skills occurred. During the first task exercise, the Paper-Clip task, I asked the group to choose a leader. Aside from explaining how to do the task, this was the only instruction I gave them. As there was no final goal given to the chosen leader during the exercise, which was followed by reflection, discussion, and feedback, the leader and the members had no idea what the responsibilities of members and leader were and what the end goal was. They did not know what to achieve, what the end goal was, and why I asked them to choose a leader and then did not give instructions concerning the final goal. It was all very confusing for them. I intended that the chosen leader would do the whole process of completing the task, lead the reflection process, and finally lead the

discussion session: the same process they had done on Day 1, but the students were lost and did not understand why I was not giving them instructions. I concluded (did my own reflection) that they were focusing on doing the content forgot that they were working on their process.

During the discussion, the students asked me about not giving instructions to finish the task, and I replied that I had done this so that they could understand their responsibilities both as members and leaders and that the course was about process, and they did not need to worry so much about end goals. The goal was for them to focus on practising their soft skills. Then in the second task – to come up with evaluation/rules guidelines – the students practiced leadership roles again and took care of the whole task and came up with evaluation questions using the newly learned divergent-explore-convergent model. They did the whole process by themselves, and they did not ask me why I was not giving them instructions, as they understood that they were learning by doing. The students had experienced confusion during the first task, the Paperclip task, and the learning that took place in that task was then implemented in the second task of creating guidelines. The students started to understand experiential learning on this day after performing these two tasks.

Following are the evaluation/guidelines that the group came up with and that I used to evaluate the performance of the group:

1. Which role did I take in the group?
2. Did I have to put myself more at the front during discussions and how?
3. Why was my feedback helpful?
4. Why am I a good or bad communicator?
5. To what extent did I use my creativity?
6. How did I solve the problem during the group task?
7. What could I do better next time?
8. How did I improve my super skills: communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership?
9. How can we improve our arguments?
10. What role do I think suits me best?
11. How does the individual want to consider learning in the future?

During the final part of the day, students wrote write down one word they had learned (a brief description), and we finished the day with check-out.

Day 3 – Implementation 2

Day 3 was the last workshop day before project work started, so the students were keen to start on the project and wanted to know what the project would be. However, there was one last task that needed to be done: Lost at Sea. The goal of this task is to help people understand different ways of communicating, the importance of working in groups vs. working alone, listening to one another, and taking initiative, and overall provides some practice in super skills.

There are a few important things that must be shared concerning the Lost at Sea task before I discuss anything else. This is to understand the importance of the process. The students were given 5-7 minutes at first to complete the individual part of the task and 10 minutes to complete the group task. The group task turned out to be a 40-minute-long task. The first learning the students learned is that group work requires more time as there is communication and agreements that must occur throughout the process, according to the students. The students also learned the importance of time management through this task, especially when they took 30 extra minutes to complete it. As I expected when I assigned the task, individuals scored lower – except for one member – and the group score was higher than the individual scores. This showed the group the importance of sharing and listening to one another. The one who scored better individually also learned that it is important to share ideas and experiences with others. The members of the group understood that there can be a person in a group who is more knowledgeable in certain areas, thus they all must know each other's skills and utilize them to achieve results.

During the task, I observed that the group was not following the instructions, so they had to start all over again. This experience reminded them of the importance of following instructions and that failure does not mean the end of something. Failure is just an experience that people need to learn from so they can improve. Lastly, at the start of the task, the group had difficulty in agreeing with each other, which led to a very illuminating long discussion. This discussion helped create an environment in which one member who was quietly listening to the others eventually got the courage to start to speak and then everyone started to work faster towards their goal.

Table 8 Day 3 in Phases I and II: Comparison

Day 3 – Phase I	Day 3 – Phase II
1. Check-in	1. Check-in
2. Lost at Sea	2. Lost at Sea
3. Group development model	3. Slides: 4Rs, feedback, IMGD
4. Feedback practice session	4. Introduction of the project
5. Role of leader and member discussed again	5. Reflection practice
	6. Feedback practice
6. Beginning of the project	7. Beginning of the project
7. Check-out	8. Check-out

After the Lost at Sea task in the first iteration, I introduced the project; however, learning from the feedback I received during the previous iteration, I added some changes in Phase II (see Table 8 below). Instead of moving towards the project instructions, I discussed and summarized the main ideas from the first two days.

I showed slides as a reminder and discussed the 4Rs, feedback, and IMGD model. After discussing these three topics, I asked the group to reflect on their learning so far. This was one last practice session for reflection before they started their project work. The students reflected individually, then shared their reflections in pairs, and then shared them with the whole group. Finally, they also wrote down their reflections for my data collection. This reflection period took about 40 minutes. Lastly, I wanted students to have one more feedback session before they started their project work. This was to make sure that they continued to give feedback during their project work and did not hesitate to do so. The students practised giving constructive feedback to each other using the following two statements:

What I like about you is...

What I want to see more in you is...

Finally, it was time to introduce the project task. This group, like the group in the previous Phase I, had to agree and choose their topic from OpenIDEO's list of available projects. At this stage, they were on their own to start the project and finish it while taking every opportunity to practise their super skills. I stayed in the class until the class time was over for any questions that they might have for me. The final thing the students did at the end of the class was check-out.

Day 4 and 5 – Implementation 2

Both days started with check-in. The days were planned as group process meetings to discuss the students' journey. In between these two days, it was their responsibility to meet to work in a group and on individual tasks given to them by their chosen leader. In the process meetings on Days 4 and 5, I encouraged them to take turns taking leadership roles to practise their super skills. I met individuals for about 10 minutes each and then I met the whole group to discuss their process journey. Another change that I made in the second iteration in Phase II was adding the feedback session. The students gave each other feedback in pairs. They discussed their journey and what they had learned from each other. The only instruction was that they first give positive feedback followed by some constructive feedback on the topic at hand. This feedback practice took place on both process meeting days. Furthermore, the students answered their evaluation questions while waiting for their meetings with me. This meant that while they were waiting, they were still reflecting and thinking about super skills, their performance, issues, and how they could do better to improve their learning and their group work.

Class time was about four hours for each day. Therefore, after the meeting, there was still some time, and the group continued to work on their project. The group decided to continue to work on their tasks according to their pre-planned timetable. The classes ended with check-out on both days.

Day 6 – Implementation 2

Day 6 was the presentation and termination stage day. I invited some audience members to attend, as this class had only one group which was presenting and no one else but me was listening. Therefore, I needed an audience, and one other teacher agreed to come. Secondly, when a group has been working for some time, it is best to end the group on a positive note, so in order to facilitate that in this phase I introduced the termination stage after the presentation was over. In this stage group members gave each other positive feedback and said their goodbyes.

The day started with check-in. Overall, the presentation that was given was very impressive, as the students managed to present their overall group highs and lows as well as individual highs and lows. The presentation started with their findings, and after the results were shared, the students started to discuss their learning. The whole presentation before the Q&As was about 40 minutes long. The students were able to discuss their present state in the acquisition of the super skills and also reflected on their plans to keep enhancing and learning/practising these super skills in future.

During the presentation the transition from one speaker to another was seamless. The only suggestion I made was that there was no eye contact with the audience from the members who were waiting for their turn to speak. After the presentation was over, the students were asked to do the check-out. This time check-out was the termination stage, so I asked students to give each other feedback and say their goodbyes before they left. They did that in pairs.

5.3 Results and Analysis of Implementation II: Key Findings

The results discussed below are taken from the feedback, reflections, observation notes, and student interviews. Explanations of the super skills involved – communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership skills – have already been discussed in the section on the first iteration. Therefore, in this section I will only discuss the content analysis of the student reflections, feedback, observation notes, and interviews with the students to discuss the students' progress in learning super skills, starting with communication skills. I have added a comparison of the main findings from this second phase with those of Phase I in cases where the main findings were the same in both phases. Thus, the analysis will proceed as follows: the main findings will be discussed and briefly summarized, followed by comparisons with the main findings from Phase I.

5.3.1 Key Findings: Communication Skills in Phase II

Prolonged conversation helps increase communication (Karaçay et al., 2022) and provides a chance to practise communication skills. It is due to such prolonged conversations that the students who participated in my course learned to listen,

reflect, and share during the course. Two examples of communication skills practice occurred on Day 2, first, when I asked the group to choose their leader, set a goal of their own, and work together to achieve it. Students were then given the task of coming up with evaluation questions. In the first instance, the students did not know what to do after choosing a leader, whereas in the second instance, when provided with a clear objective and a goal, the students in the group took only about 15 minutes to complete the task. When a clear goal was presented to the group, the group produced the required results immediately, but there was very little communication skill practice. When I did not give a clear goal, the students did not know what to do. This uncertainty created a situation in which the students had to communicate more with each other to come up with their own goals and achieve them. Therefore, sometimes it is best not to worry about producing results and instead spend time on enhancing and practicing communication skills.

During Phase II, the enhancement of communication skills appeared through the following main characteristics: *Listening, Building trust, Reflection, and Inclusion*. I devised the categories used in the discussion of Phase I through content analysis of the data collected in the form of reflections, interviews, and observations. Similarly, in Phase II I devised the above categories based on content analysis of the data I collected. The categories in Phase II are named based on the similarities and meanings connected with the categories used in describing Phase I. Following is Table 9, which presents the categories for both phases in order to provide a visual representation and comparison.

Table 9 Key Findings for Fostering Super Skills: Communication Skills in Phase II and Comparison with Phase I

Phase I: Communication skills categories	**Phase II: Communication skills categories**
Reflection and feedback, *Active participation and sharing,* *Listening,* *Inclusion,* *Practice,* *Building trust,* *Atmosphere, and* *Ideation.*	*Listening,* *Building trust,* *Reflection, and* *Inclusion.*

Most importantly, the enhancement of the students' communication skills came from practising *Listening* skills. In the first iteration, the students mentioned that listening enhanced their communication skills while they worked on tasks and activities. Tasks such as Lost at Sea and coming up with evaluation questions helped

in Phase I. Similarly, in Phase II the comments made by the students in Phase II were nearly identical to the student comments from Phase I and rated listening as an important skill to have in order to improve and enhance their communication skills. In this phase, apart from the tasks, feedback also played a crucial part in helping the students understand the importance of listening. Some students such as S12 discussed listening as playing an important role in enhancing her communication skills in the course.

Student S12 understood that even though her ideas were good, and that she could use them to work on her own, there is something different and unique in listening to the ideas and suggestions (feedback) of others and then combining them with one's own ideas to achieve even better results. Furthermore, S12 reflected that it is important to listen to others and their ideas, but one must also stand up for one's own ideas. S12 furthermore stated that communication is not easy; it takes time:

> *Even when I think I am right I have to listen to the others and their ideas. I must stand up for myself and my ideas. Communication takes time, more time than doing it on my own (S12).*

S12 understood that if she worked alone, she could do the work in less time. Yet there is value in listening to others, which adds even more value to her own work. S12 elaborated that even though she sometimes has a viable solution to a problem, this does not mean that there is only one solution that she alone can come up with. In short, she understood that in teamwork she must first know and listen to what others have to say and acknowledge that there may be more than one solution to a problem. This process of listening to others and discussing multiple ways and solutions to a problem can be time-consuming, but S12 believes that doing so is worth it.

Similarly, S13 discussed in her reflection about listening to others in order to achieve better communication skills practice. In group work equality matters. Equality means that everyone is equally important and the ideas that others share should all be listened to before any decision is made. S13 understood after the first workshop task that she must listen to others and give their opinions equal importance. Furthermore, she stated that everyone shares an equal amount of responsibility for group work, so their comments should be treated with equal respect:

> *I can take away from today that I have to make sure to listen to my group members, to see them as equal members and to communicate with them. I should consider all opinions and points of view to be equivalent and meaningful. These bring us to the goal together (S13).*

Both S12 and S13 agree that they need to listen to others before a final decision is made. As a result, connections were made through listening, communication started to happen constantly, new ideas were discovered, and overall, the students learned to compromise and listen to each other in order to solve problems.

In short, the students in Phase II used listening to practise communication skills during their group work. Listening helped them understand different points of view held by others, and this helped them come up with solutions quickly – solutions for which everyone took responsibility. Listening happened during tasks and activities, and through the experiential learning that occurred during group work the students recognized the importance of listening. They then continued to use this listening skill during their project work to continue to improve their communication skills.

Considering what the students in both Phase I and Phase II have said about using listening to practise communication skills, I will present three main findings in the communication skills category that are useful to understand communication skills. Firstly, the students agreed that the use of tasks during the workshop days help them understand the importance of listening. Secondly, listening more and speaking less in a group enhances communication skills. Finally, the students learned that giving their full attention to the work at hand and sharing what they know is better than not participating and sharing in a misguided attempt to avoid creating mistrust.

As in Phase I, in Phase II the enhancement of communication skills happened through *building trust*. Building trust means the process of developing a sense of confidence between people to help them understand mutual respect and cooperation. Tasks and activities were used in the course to help the students learn to trust each other. From the first activity of creative introductions to the last task on Day 3, Lost at Sea, I continuously promoted building trust in a team. As a result, many students discussed the importance of trust on different occasions as can be seen from the following discussion.

Building trust was mentioned by both S12 and S15 as an important communication skill to have in a group. S12 took some time to open up to others and communicate in the group. During the discussions on the first day, she was quiet at first. Listening to the others and seeing them actively participate and share encouraged her to open up and speak, and her comment shows why she was quiet and why she later started to communicate:

> *If I don't know, it is okay to ask, group members will help me (S12).*

The key to S12's breakthrough was realizing that she had to learn to trust the other students. As soon as she realized she was in a trusting atmosphere and that no one was judging her ideas, and her ideas mattered, she started trusting. Similarly, S15 also started to trust in her abilities during the group work, as can be seen from the following comment:

> *I think I made progress when it comes to trusting myself, listening to the opinions of others and obtaining skills like communication (S15).*

She learned to trust herself because the others showed her that they valued what she had to say and contribute. Both comments by S12 and S15 quoted above show that trust-building occurs slowly and with time. Therefore, it is important to spend more time and effort to create a trusting environment.

In short, building trust to enhance the communication skills of the students happened in the following ways. Firstly, focusing on building trust among students encouraged openness and participation. As mentioned above, S12 initially was hesitant to communicate but started to participate as soon as she realized that her ideas were being welcomed and valued. Her reflection shows how trust can encourage students to overcome any issues and challenges and help them participate in discussions. Secondly, building trust helped empower the students' self-expression. Trust empowered students like S15 to share their ideas and express their points of view. Thirdly, trust helped reduce the fear of judgment, as in the case of S12: upon realizing that no one was judging her, she started to trust in her abilities and ideas. This, in turn, helped her communicate and practice her communication skills. Fourthly, trust enhanced the confidence of the students. When they realized that their contributions were appreciated and enhanced the value of the ideas and discussions, they became more confident in their sharing of ideas. Finally, trust-building promoted collaborative problem-solving. When the students trusted each other and saw that everyone is equally responsible for the group, then they were more likely to share and collaborate, which, in turn, helps them solve problems.

Considering what the students said in Phase I and Phase II, it can be concluded that trust-building enhanced communication skills in five ways for the students. Firstly, building trust enhanced participation and expression for the students. Secondly, students managed to build trust because they actively engaged in their group work during workshop days and project time. Thirdly, they were able to express their ideas and overcame their fear of judgment. Fourthly, building trust helped students increase their confidence and collaboration among themselves during the course. Lastly, autonomy also helped students in building trust over time. Trust was gradually developed throughout the course by creating a working environment where students were able to communicate and share their ideas with ease. These are the five trust building ways through which students were able to enhance their communication skills during the course in both phases.

Thirdly, *Reflection* was mentioned in the student reflections and feedback as an important way to increase communication skills in individuals and groups. Reflection was done after every task and activity. The students were encouraged to reflect throughout their project work, and they used the 4Rs model to do that. The reflection was done individually and in groups. It was when the reflection was shared that communication skills practice occurred among the students.

S13 mentioned in her reflections that, as a student, defining her own rules and then working on them was something she had not done in the past. She was used to working on instructions given to her by her bosses, teachers, and managers. She did not think that she could work freely at the start of the course. In one of her early reflections, she realized that she had been given autonomy, and she could now freely work in a group and share her ideas. She had a bit difficultly doing so, since in the

past she had been trained to just work on given assignments and tasks. Working freely was something new for her:

> *Today I learned that I am not used to being able to work freely in a group. I am used to clearly defined boundaries and clear roles (S13).*

Reflection helped S13 understand how to work in a group. When she worked on group tasks in my course, she was expected to contribute her thoughts and, together with her group, she was asked to finish the task. There were no clearly defined boundaries. She had to work and come up with goals and boundaries on her own. The task of creating own evaluation questionnaire is a good example that helped S13 and many other students to work in groups. This way of working (Evaluation Task), in which she had to come up with her own goals and boundaries, was a bit difficult for her, and she reflected that she was not used to working freely in a group.

Another student, S15, with the help of reflection, recognized the strengths and weaknesses of others during the workshop days. She understood that everyone thinks differently and that the differences are strengths and not weaknesses. She learned, therefore, that it is important to be aware of others and their ideas:

> *I found it very interesting to see that everybody had a different view when they gave their thoughts about the use of paper clips. This was a reminder/awareness for me that every person is different. I think it was good to talk about it to become aware of that (S15).*

Communication skills practice can be difficult at times. In Phase I S8 and her group faced a lot of challenges, and, at times, communicating was hard. In the second phase, with only four students, there were not many challenges that hindered communication skills practice. There were, however, a few instances where communication skills practice was felt to be difficult, as in the case of S15:

> *Today it took more than an hour to rank 15 items with a group of 4 people. During the process, I thought this took us way too long and that it was a waste of time. But after referring to and reviewing (mentioning the 4Rs model) I thought I learned more than the day before (S15).*

S15 is referring to the task Lost at Sea. At first, she thought that it was a waste of time to listen to others, agree first, and then move forward in the task. She thought that she could have done it better alone. However, on her own she did not manage to survive, whereas when she worked in a group, she did survive. This experience helped her understand that even though working in the group took more time, the group helped her survive. Self-reflection and sharing helped her understand the importance of communication in a group. Her reflection helped her realize that she was learning new things every day. Understandably, it takes time for students to agree with each other and move forward during the early stages of group development, as per the IMGD model. The same group, after it has worked together for some time, will be able to perform much more quickly as they will be more accustomed to each other and will know the strengths and weaknesses of each member. Thus, it took S15 longer

to understand being part of a group means surviving (as evident from the Lost at Sea Task results), afterwards she acknowledged that she had gained important learning experience and that was what mattered. Reflection enhanced her learning, and the whole process enhanced her communication skills. Thus, it is good when things get difficult, as the situation creates more options for communication skills practice.

Thus, the enhancement of communication skills occurred in the following five ways with the help of reflection. The students increased their self-awareness through reflection. Their understanding of group dynamics and group development increased through reflection. Constant reflection helped the students recognize diverse opinions, and this recognition created better awareness and understanding of different points of view, which, in turn, enhanced their communication skills. Through reflection, the students understood learning from experiences – experiential learning. Experiences such as the one recorded by S15 concerning the task Lost at Sea show how shared reflection from all participants helped her understand learning from experiences of one another. At first, she thought that she could work alone better, but after seeing and experiencing the results and not surviving alone, she realized the importance of working and communicating with others. Reflection enhanced the problem-solving skills of the students. Through tasks, various activities, and project work they recognized that working on challenges helped them solve problems and come up with workable solutions that were supported by all involved.

After analysing reflection, I have three main findings about how what helped enhance the communication skills of the students in both Phases I and II. Reflection deepened the students' understanding of self-awareness, group development, and group dynamics. By doing self and group reflection, the students appreciated the diversity of views and ideas shared throughout the course. This diverse viewpoint enhanced the students' understanding and respect for the point of view of others. They learned to combine diverse viewpoints through communication, resulting in enhanced communication skills. Lastly, through reflection the students gained experiential learning and problem-solving skills that are essential for effective communication.

Finally, *Inclusion* was mentioned by students as an important skill to have when it came to enhancing their communication skills. Inclusion simply means allowing other members of the group to be in each other's conversations before decisions are made. Inclusion helps with time management, too, as including others in conversations and showing trust in the abilities of others decreases delays and wastes of time. Following are the students' reflections and discussions on inclusion.

S14 mentioned that to practise communication skills better, we need to be very clear in our expressions to avoid delays and waste of time:

> *From the activity of drawing apple shapes, I realize that it is important to be clear about what we want to express, and we should express it precisely. Otherwise, a lot of time and resources would be wasted in an organization (S14).*

Tasks such as the Apple Task and Lost at Sea also helped the students understand inclusion. They understood while working on different tasks that it is very important to communicate with others. This means including others in the conversation, as mentioned by S12:

> *During the drawing [the Apple Task] I realized how important it is to communicate in a group. Furthermore, I realized that creativity needs time and will develop in the process of collecting ideas (S12).*

By including others, S12 realized that her creativity developed as more ideas were shared. The process of collecting ideas entails practising nonverbal communication skills.

S13, who understood the importance of ideas for inclusion, mentioned that she would include all the members in the conversation and address their questions and concerns before moving forward:

> *I learned from yesterday's session that I have to communicate with all group members and should address every single question (S13).*

Furthermore, during our first process day meeting on Day 4 (a week after Day 3), S13 reflected on inclusion:

> *As a group, we have to work better together. I can contribute to this by concentrating on my topics and not holding back. I have to learn to remain steadfast despite the arduous discussions and to continue the process. I should also convey this to the other members. We as a group should discuss more with each other. This can only happen if we do not accept everything and question more things. The discussion will give us different perspectives (S13).*

The stress here is on the importance of practising communication skills and always keeping the lines of communication open. S13 also understood that it is important to question others, and that this is not done to create arguments, but to understand each other and to move forward. The productivity of the group, however, suffers when someone is not included in discussions, according to S14, who was a bit of an introvert and needed some trust from others. He mentioned that he wanted to get involved in group conversations and show more confidence in doing so:

> *I should try to get involved in the group conversation, and try to express ideas confidently (S14).*

In short, inclusion helped the students enhance their communication skills in the ways highlighted in the student reflections above. As everyone was encouraged to be involved in the group, the students were able to get involved with the help of clear and to-the-point communication. Including others in discussions led to increased creativity and ideation, which, in turn, created a collaborative environment that was ripe for practicing communication skills. When everyone is included in the conversation, no one will avoid working, thus the productivity of the group increases. This practice also helped the students avoid unnecessary delays and waste of time when they were working on their main project. By focusing on inclusion, everyone

valued the opinions of the others, which enhanced the overall group dynamics. Lastly, inclusion helped build the students' confidence, enabling to participate in their groups without the fear of judgment.

Inclusion was also mentioned in the student reflections in Phase I. Therefore, once again we can analyse and discuss common points in both phases that helped enhance the communication skills of the students. Firstly, inclusion helped create effective communication and collaboration among the students. This happened because of continuous communication and collaboration leading to trust-building and sharing. Secondly, inclusion helped increase and enhance group dynamics and the development of the groups, as well as increasing the productivity of both individuals and groups during the course. With better group dynamics and productivity, the students managed to reduce wastage of time, which gave them a chance to practise their soft skills. Thirdly, by recognizing the importance of inclusion, the students were able to build their confidence in each other. They did that once they understood the importance of sharing and that no one would give unnecessary or negative judgments. By removing the fear of judgment, the students were able to build their confidence and started to communicate better and, in turn, had better chances to practise their communication skills. Lastly, inclusion helped the students understand experiential learning practically. Different tasks and activities gave them the chance to include others in their conversations, trust them with their opinions, act as one and learn from each other's experiences. This teamwork showed the students the practical advantages of learning from one another.

Furthermore, in Phase II three themes emerged during three workshop days regarding soft skills practice. The themes were *learning, focusing, and understanding*. Day 1 of the workshops was dedicated to learning more about communication skills and getting to know each other through communication. The theme of Day 2 was focusing on learning leadership skills. Similarly, on the third day, the theme was about understanding feedback and project work through which the students were able to understand motivation and initiative skills.

Analysis of Key Findings

The communication skills that we discussed in this phase are listening, building trust, reflection, and inclusion. The main trait, listening, was used by the students throughout the whole course to continue to improve their communication skills. Tasks and activities also played an important role in this regard. While working on tasks the students were able to understand the importance of listening. By actively listening to each other, they were able to understand different points of view, which helped them make decisions and distribute responsibilities based on the skills of the members of the groups. In their interviews S12 and S13 said that they improved their listening by actively taking part in group work and giving and receiving feedback.

The second main finding was that building trust was another important factor that helped enhance the communication skills of the students. Trust created openness and encouraged participation among teammates during this phase. The students who were hesitant at first to share their ideas in the groups started to share once their trust in their teammates had been built up in the class. S12 is an example of a student who was hesitant at first, but when she realized that her ideas were valued, she started to share and encouraged others to do the same. Once an atmosphere of trust had been created, the students felt more confident in their abilities, collaborated better, and performed better in problem-solving.

The third main finding was that reflection played a significant role in enhancing the communication skills of the students. The students reflected after every task and activity that took place in the class, during project work, and every time they did any group work. Through reflection, they became self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses early in the course. This process of reflection gave the students insights and diverse opinions and ideas to work with, which resulted in continuous communication skills practice. This enabled them to focus on what weaknesses they needed to focus on more. Thus, by reflecting more, the students practiced their communication skills.

Finally, inclusion appeared to be a key factor that strengthened the communication skills of the students. Inclusion encouraged the students to communicate and share their thoughts. By giving value to each other's comments, they created an inclusive environment that stimulated creativity and ideation, resulting in more communication skills practice. Furthermore, constant constructive feedback prevented (any) annoyance from occurring that could hinder their communication skills practice. By being open to listening to constructive feedback, the students accepted and included comments, suggestions, and ideas from all, which resulted in enhanced group dynamics and a relaxed environment that increased the confidence of the students.

5.3.2 Key Findings: Motivation and Initiative Skills in Phase II

As in Phase I, throughout the course in Phase II, the students used tasks and activities to learn to motivate, get motivated, and volunteer to lead teams to enhance their motivation and initiative skills. Furthermore, I observed that the process meeting days helped the students understand motivation and initiative skills of their own.

In Phase II, the enhancement of motivation and initiative skills appeared through the main findings via content analysis which focused on *Cooperation, Participation, Acceptance, Preparation, and Experiential Learning*. The students practised their motivation and initiative skills by working on the individual skills listed above as main findings. The students practised their motivation skills, and they also practised their initiative skills by taking initiatives to help others get motivated. The categories in Phase II are named based on the similarities and meanings used in the Phase I

categories and are presented in Table 10. The main findings of phase II are discussed next.

Table 10 Key Findings for Fostering Super Skills: Motivation and Initiative Skills in Phase II and Comparison with Phase I

Phase I: Motivation and Initiative skills categories	**Phase II: Motivation and Initiative skills categories**
Experiential learning, *Preparation,* *Participation,* *Cooperation, and* *Acceptance*	*Cooperation,* *Participation,* *Acceptance,* *Preparation, and* *Experiential Learning.*

The first main finding concerns *Cooperation,* which played a significant role in enhancing both the motivation and initiative skills of the students. Cooperation started from the very beginning with the creative Introductions activity, which established an atmosphere of sharing and collaboration among the students. To make cooperation effective among the students, motivation strategies were considered during the workshop days, and tasks and activities were used to motivate students. The workshop-based group activities and tasks helped create a judgment-free environment that enabled the students to work with confidence.

The atmosphere of motivation, supported through cooperation, facilitated the students in taking initiative in motivating their group members during the workshop days and especially during their project work. Four students mentioned the importance of cooperation in enhancing their motivation and initiative skills. Cooperation leads to equal sharing and moving forward when all are on board. The lesson many students discussed is that if someone is not contributing, then the rest should be patient and give the person time to get the motivation to share. They did that by showing that they were listening to each other without judgment, as well as by sharing their thoughts. This thoughtfulness of the students and their motivation skills practice will be discussed next.

S12 commented that, for her, group work was only possible if all the members were sharing and there was a trusting environment where all opinions were accepted. On the other hand, S13 emphasized the importance of patience and waiting for other members to open up:

> *Group work is therefore only possible for me if everyone contributes equally and with equal effort, whereby different opinions are accepted (S12).*
> *I have to be patient and wait for everyone to open up (S13).*

Some of the tasks such as Lost at Sea also helped students practice their motivation and initiative skills. S14 recognized the importance of tasks and their usefulness in developing cooperation among team members and enhancing motivation and initiative skills:

> *I realized that teamwork can be really helpful through the Lost at Sea activity (S14).*

These reflections and statements from the students reinforce the idea that through tasks the students get motivated and took the initiative, thereby getting to practise these soft skills.

Finally, here is an example of how working together made the students motivated and take initiative in helping their teammates. S13 was having a tough time doing her part of the research for the project work, and S15 helped her finish her research tasks:

> *I worked on my super skill of motivation today as well. After the 'lecture', I helped S13 to get a better overview by searching [for]sources together (S15).*

In short, the students emphasized in their reflections how cooperation served as a medium for enhancing their motivation and initiative skills during the course. The environment that was created during the workshop days also created a productive atmosphere for the students to practise their motivation and initiative skills: hence cooperation enabled engaging group activities to foster motivation skills practice. Once trust and sharing were built up among the students, cooperation promoted taking initiatives. The collaborative and supportive environment that the students created was only possible because they learned to cooperate early in their interactions, which resulted in more time spent on practicing their skills.

The next major trait mentioned by the students that came up in my content analysis is *Participation* which helped them to enhance their motivation and initiative skills during the course. Participation means taking part in the group work. The question that arises is why the students mentioned participation as a skill here that enhances motivation and initiative skills. My observations indicate that the students mentioned it because the students willingly participated and continued to do so every day during the course, which shows their motivation and initiative. Similarly, the tasks and activities on each day helped the students learn to participate and effectively enhance their motivation and initiative skills.

Two students mentioned that participation was crucial in enhancing their motivation and initiative skills. The management of time and stress on working together was mentioned to strengthen participation by the participating students. S13 mentioned that to achieve her group's goal she needed to focus on the group work and the journey. She suggested that goals can be achieved by working together and relying on each other's skills. She also stated that if one works alone and there is no participation from group members, then it is hard to complete tasks and reach the desired goals in time. This also means that if there is no participation, then the

other members of the group might not agree with the goals and results achieved. Thus, without participation, it is difficult to say that the required goal has been achieved with the agreement of all:

> *The process of group work should currently be in the foreground for me and not the goal. The goal can only be achieved if I and my group members can work well together because I will not be able to do it alone (S13).*

At one stage in their group work, the students were behind on time; later, after some discussions and feedback, they realized that someone in a group needed to take the responsibility of keeping an eye on time, so that the rest of the group does not have to worry about it. One student took the initiative during one of the group meetings to keep an eye on time. Because of this initiative, the rest of the group was able to focus more on their work, and the whole process went smoothly thereafter. The following comment by S15 shows her achievement and satisfaction with her participation and contribution to the group:

> *I did improve my motivation skills, because of focusing on the time (S15).*

In short, participation was also considered an important contributing factor in enhancing the motivation and initiative skills of the students. Willingness to take part in the group work showed, in a practical way, that the students were both motivated and were taking initiative in learning these skills. According to the students, participation involves collaborative time management and working collaboratively as a team. The students also realized that someone must take responsibility for managing time so that the rest can focus more on the task at hand. Hence, keeping focused is also an important factor connected with participation. Ultimately, while the project work was underway, participation acted as a medium that drove the students to take part, take initiative, and contribute during the process.

After some time working in a group, trust-building started to occur, and that was when *Acceptance* came into discussions. Acceptance is the third main finding, according to the students, that enhanced their motivation and initiative skills. Acceptance means being welcomed by others. One aspect of acceptance is that others do not judge you when you share your ideas. Acceptance also means that you accept that you will probably make some mistakes. Mistakes are not something to be frustrated about but should be considered as learning opportunities.

Three students discussed acceptance as a means of enhancing both motivation and initiative skills. In the Paper Clip task, the students were instructed to come up with as many uses of paper clips as possible. The process of creativity and ideation takes time, as S12 learned from this task. Her comment below shows that she understood and accepted that creativity and better ideas will come, and that she must continue to work and push through:

> *It takes time to be creative. After the first idea, I got frustrated. I must push through this. A good idea will come (S12).*

Another student, S13, accepted that she had to work on the process (journey) more to learn and practice her soft skills. She said this because she understood that by focusing on the process, she was enhancing her super skills:

> *I have to work on not being so reserved anymore. I should keep reminding myself that it is not important what we work on, but how we do it! (S13).*

Furthermore, S13 accepted that good group work occurs when there is motivation among teammates, including her:

> *I also have to be motivated and motivate everyone else, because this is the only way for good group work (S13).*

Finally, an example of both motivation and initiative skills practice shows that once the group accepts you, your level of motivation rises, and you take the initiative to help others, which leads to trust-building. S15 acted as a leader, and her ideas and the guidelines that she used during her leadership gained trust and acceptance from her teammates:

> *When getting feedback, the group members said that they were happy about the guidelines I gave them during the meeting. It gave a nice feeling to hear that what you are doing is good. This motivated me to continue with our last step: doing the presentation on Wednesday (S15).*

In short, for the students, acceptance was another means to enhance their motivation and initiative skills during the course. Acceptance, together with building trust and understanding that mistakes are opportunities to learn and do things better, created a judgment-free environment within which the students were able to work creatively, focus on their journey, and work on their leadership. Overall, acceptance created a mindset where the students were able to practise their soft skills: motivation and initiative.

Preparation is the next important finding/trait in the motivation and initiative skills category that students mentioned which helped them enhance their learning. Preparation means coming equipped to participate in group discussions. By the end of Day 2, the word 'preparation' started to appear in student reflections. This shows that it took some time for the students to understand the importance of being prepared for group work. Not coming prepared for group work will mean that the performance of the group is not at 100%, which reduces motivation and causes members to be reluctant to take initiative. When students see that someone is just sitting and not contributing, they might wonder why they bothered to come prepared with research and material for discussion. When everyone is prepared and has material to discuss, the group performs better as there is trust in the abilities of the others and the knowledge that everyone is contributing. In two separate reflections by S12, we can observe that, at first, she wanted to know how to be a good leader to motivate others. Later she reflected on her success in coming prepared for the group work. The first reflection shows her motivation to learn; the second reflection shows the reward she got by coming prepared:

I would like to train how to be a good leader and to give people a chance to stand up for their ideas [shows motivation] (S12).

I have prepared well for the group work, which the others have reported positively in the feedback. I was able to express my opinion in group discussions and bring in new ideas (S12).

In her reflection, S13 also discussed the importance of coming prepared for group work. By coming prepared and being ready to discuss, she was able to explain her point of view, which helped her deal with discussions and arguments raised against her point of view during the discussions:

We as a group should try to justify every decision and every proposal. I have to try to explain my arguments well so that the other group members can understand my point of view (S13).

Finally, S15, who was not prepared well enough during one of the group discussions, reflected on the importance of preparation, showing her motivation to do better in future:

The next time, I will try to focus and adapt more to my position. This way, the actual leader could also better see the effect of his/her leadership on the group members (S15).

In short, preparation helped the students practise their motivation and initiative skills. A few students did not need external motivation to encourage them to help and share in the class. As long as they came prepared, everything went smoothly for them, and they had time to practise their soft skills. Those who sometimes did not come prepared for their group meetings learned the importance of doing so in future. The student reflections show that motivation is an innate ability that diminishes very fast, and to keep it steady or growing, coming prepared to class is very important. It is not only important for the person him-/herself but is equally important for the other members of the group. Seeing someone prepared or unprepared can bring the motivation levels in the group up or down. Furthermore, depending on the motivation, initiative will or will not occur in the group. Thus, coming prepared will give the students more time to practise their soft skills, especially motivation and initiative skills.

Lastly, *Experiential Learning* was discussed by three students as a skill which helped them enhance their motivation and initiative skills. Experiential learning means learning from one experience and implementing this learning in the next experience. Here are a few of the lessons that students said that they had learned. S12 stated that everyone should be on the same page while working in a group; otherwise, it is difficult for the group to move forward. Furthermore, she reflected on her lack of focus, which resulted in a one session that was less than satisfactory:

At our last group meeting, I learned how difficult it is to do a good job if not everyone is in the same place. I tried to involve all group members. From my perspective, I managed to do this quite well. The feedback from the other group

members confirmed this. I noticed that I wasn't that focused. That didn't help the group. For the next session, I will try to find my focus again (S12).

S12 mentioned "focus" and "being in the same place" as two means of preparation for the group work. S13 adds to this list by saying that as a leader I need to involve everyone, so everyone is ready to discuss. S13 wants others to do the same for her so she can feel involved. Furthermore, she discusses how she tries to be patient and motivate other members of her group in order to create an environment where everyone contributes:

I have to make sure that all group members feel involved and that they can contribute and express their ideas freely. I tried to do that before and rated myself rather highly. I remain patient and try to motivate the members. I have to learn to be more open in some situations and not to withdraw (S13).

S15 stated that her experiential learning came from trust and cooperation, which she intends to continue to develop and use in future.

I think I made progress when it comes to trusting myself. Maybe in the future, I can do more cooperation as well with the other group members when having a meeting: do it together (S15).

In short, in the course, the students used experiential learning many times to improve on and meet the challenges they faced. Experiential learning that happened while overcoming these challenges improved their personal development. It also made it easy to open up to listening and understanding others and enhanced the will power of the students in dealing with challenges. The most important lessons the students learn through experiences involved improved focus, active engagement, patience, and collaboration. Due to the students' experiential learning, the development of their motivation and initiative skills was made possible during the course.

Summary of Key Findings

Several factors contributed to the enhancement of the students' motivation and initiative skills during the course in Phase II. *Cooperation* promoted a motivating and initiative-driven atmosphere for the students to not only nurture their soft skills but also facilitate group work. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of participation, together with learning to manage time and focusing on teamwork, played a crucial role in enhancing the students' soft skills. The students acknowledged the role of *acceptance* in creating a judgment-free and creative mindset, atmosphere, trust-building, and embracing mistakes as learning opportunities in order to enhance motivation and initiative skills. They also highlighted the importance of *preparation* and its impact on motivation and initiative-taking. Coming prepared allowed for smoother interactions among teammates, which gave them enough time to focus on learning and practicing soft skills. Lastly, individuals used experiential learning to grow their skills during the course. The lessons the students learned from experiences

were focusing on the journey instead of on the end goals, engaging with teammates in the form of reflection and feedback, having the patience to listen and understand others, and collaborating. These lessons developed the motivation and initiative skills of the students. Overall, these main factors worked collectively to encourage and enhance students' motivation and initiative skills during the course, leading to ongoing learning experiences.

Analysis of the Key Findings in Both Phases

In both phases the students mentioned cooperation as an important way to enhance motivation and initiative skills. Some of the common themes that occur in my content analysis will be discussed in this section. Cooperation promoted trust, understanding, and a supportive environment for practising soft skills. The students found cooperation empowering they were able to express themselves freely and openly in their groups, and they were actively engaged in group work. Accepting the importance of cooperation early in the course led to enhanced motivation and initiative skills practice during the course; it also contributed to the students' personal development as well as group development. Finally, cooperation helped create a positive environment that helped the students engage with each other, resulting in practicing soft skills like motivation and initiative.

In analysing the two phases, I will discuss some of the key ideas that emerged to help in understanding how participation helped enhance the motivation and initiative skills of the students. The first essential quality that must exist is willingness to participate. If the participants do not want to with others, there can be no group work. This is precisely the reason a workshop-based, learn-by-doing approach was used in this course: so that the students had every chance to be able to overcome challenges such as willingness to work in a group. Secondly, time management and focus are needed in a collaborative work environment; without these traits, it is not possible to participate effectively, and unnecessary issues will arise within the group. Thirdly, for participation to happen it is important to focus on active engagement and collaboration. Focusing on these key ideas enhances participation in a group and contributes to a productive work environment, resulting in more time to practise soft skills such as motivation and initiative.

In both phases the students mentioned acceptance as a main factor that promotes the learning of motivation and initiative skills. Acceptance creates or encourages a supportive environment where students can express and participate without fear of judgment. Being able to freely share opinions and ideas without the fear of judgment helped the students to work freely during the course. Students like S3, S5, and S7, as well as a few others, were fearful at first of sharing their ideas and opinions based on their previous experiences. Understanding and accepting that in this course they could share without fear of judgment inspired them and helped them practice their motivation and initiative skills. They were inspired to work with others and share.

Therefore, they were motivated, and they took the initiative to motivate others to do the same. Due to judgment free environment the students were able to practise their motivation and initiative skills. Thus, acceptance fostered motivation and initiative skills among the students.

In Phases I and II, the students highlighted the importance of coming prepared for their group work. Here I will discuss and analyse preparation to understand how it helped the students learn and practise motivation and initiative skills during the course. Firstly, the preparation discussion illustrates that motivation is an ability which can diminish or grow stronger depending upon the groups' involvement. Secondly, it became apparent during the course that coming prepared helped facilitate the groups better, resulting in more time generated for practicing soft skills. Coming prepared supports long-term motivation for both the person and those with whom the person interacts. This also results in people taking the initiative or motivating others to take the initiative during group work. Next, being prepared helps with leadership as it develops a sense of ownership as well as responsibility to actively take part in the work. This extensive skill development due to being prepared, especially during project work, paired with a judgement free environment for learning, helped the students experience learning and personal growth, eventually improving their motivation and initiative skills.

In both Phase I and II the students discussed experiential learning as an important factor in enhancing their motivation and initiative skills. Here I will discuss some of the main points mentioned in the student reflections in both phases. Experiential learning was considered crucial and critical by the students to develop and adopt. Once the advantages of experiential learning were understood, it became apparent to the students that to practise their soft skills, they would need to keep in mind previous experiences and challenges that they had faced. The challenges of listening to others, keeping an open mind, keeping focused, being engaged, being patient, and collaborating are among many of the challenges the students faced during their work for the course. Throughout the course, the addition of experiential learning, along with other key factors discussed in this section, resulted in a continuous journey of growth and the development of motivation and initiative skills for the participating students.

5.3.3 Key Findings: Leadership Skills in Phase II

During my content analysis of Phase II, the enhancement of leadership skills appeared through the following main factors: *Listening, Acceptance, Understanding, Management, and Growth.* Furthermore, through content analysis of leadership skills, three themes appeared on each workshop day. On the first day, my focus was on helping understand leadership skills to the students. On the second day, I focused on the implementation (practice) of leadership skills. On the third day and onward I focused on learning from practicing leadership skills. The keen interest the

students displayed in understanding, implementing, and then learning to be better at leadership roles shows their motivation to learn leadership skills. The students also took the initiative by helping their fellow teammates as much as they could in learning leadership skills.

I devised Phase I and II categories through content analysis. While in Phase I leadership was generally viewed in terms of factors like understanding, listening, growth, and taking charge, in Phase II acceptance and management also became key factors (see Table 11).

Table 11 The main Key Findings for Fostering Super Skills: Leadership Skills in Phase II and Comparison with Phase I

Phase I: Leadership skills categories	**Phase II: Leadership skills categories**
Understanding, *Listening,* *Growth, and* *Taking charge*	*Listening,* *Acceptance,* *Understanding,* *Management, and* *Growth*

First of all, *Listening* was mentioned by three students in both Phases as an important leadership skill. The leadership skills practice started in the workshop days and continued during the project days, where the students were encouraged to take turns practising their leadership skills. The tasks that were used during the course helped the students during the first three workshop days to understand leadership through listening and its importance, as mentioned by S13:

> *I have to listen to others and involve everyone. I also learned that we are better as a team than alone. We survived (S13).*

S13 understood the importance of leading a team and involving everyone by listening to their opinions and suggestions after she saw that she only survived (in the Lost at Sea task) because of her team. Moreover, S14 shared valuable input on the role of a leader. According to him, a leader learns from others by listening to them. A leader should also come prepared for meetings, so that he/she is ready to lead. Furthermore, a leader is a person who oversees the distribution of roles to members; therefore, he/she needs to be well prepared and more knowledgeable about the members and the topic at hand than the rest of the group:

> *What I learned is that a leader should learn something from their team members and try to listen to individuals' opinions. Also, a leader should prepare more content for discussion before the meeting (S14).*

On the other hand, S15, who initially tried to take over the leadership of her group at the same time when another student was already leading, reflected on her

not-so-successful experience. This takeover of leadership was bound to happen in the early stages of the IMGD model, as the group was new and was going through Stage 1 at a time when multiple members tried to take on the leading role:

> *I have the feeling that I maybe did not listen enough to the leader but tried to be the leader as well. This is because I am used to being the leader when I am doing group work back home. The next time, I will try to focus and adapt more to my position. This way, the actual leader could also better see the effect of his/her leadership on the group members (S15).*

S15 did not listen to her leader and instead tried to be one, but she realized that this did not benefit the group and its performance. Her experience helped her start listening to others and start trusting in the abilities of the existing leaders. In the end, S15 helped the group find a natural leader and group move upward on the IMGD scale.

In short, listening was considered an important part of practising leadership skills by the students. Their leadership practice started early during the workshop days. They were introduced to leadership skills, and from Day 2 onwards they were asked to take on leadership roles to practise their leadership skills. During this time, listening was the first key factopr that the students realized was important for practicing their leadership skills. The students learned from their teammates, and they learned from challenges that came up when multiple students tried to take on leadership roles at the same time.

The second main factor *Acceptance* was considered an important step in becoming a leader and enhancing leadership skills. Asking for help, asking for suggestions, asking for guidance, or forgetting something and being reminded by others all come under the category of acceptance, according to the data analysis. Regular discussions in the groups created a trusting environment among the students. After trust was built and they all realized that mistakes are important tools that help with learning, it became easier for them to accept feedback from each other and not take it personally. S12 built up her trust and sought help, when necessary, without fear of judgment:

> *If I am a leader and I don´t know the task it is okay to ask for help - group members will help me (S12).*

S12 had had a bad experience in a previous workplace. Working with the group in this course helped her understand that leaders can be good-natured and are there to help her and accept her opinions and ideas. The group accepted her, and she accepted them:

> *In the group discussion, I realized that S15 is our leader- but that she is a nice one, who accepts different opinions (S12).*

Students like S15 were not afraid of making mistakes. She understood that mistakes help her learn. In her reflection, she mentions that during one meeting her group had to work without a leader and as a result they struggled:

I forgot to choose a leader when starting, this I will not forget anymore (starting from the next meeting, not today's) (S15).

Not having a leader is not an issue when one is working for a long time in the same group because one is on a higher stage in the IMGD model. However, S15's group was new, and they needed a leader, especially during their project days. Therefore, forgetting to choose a leader is a big problem because working without a leader creates mistrust, it takes more time to do the actual work, and no one knows what the goals are and who is doing what. Group members start to work individually and lose track of things. As a result, the performance of the group suffers.

In short, the concept of acceptance emerged as an important part of developing leadership skills in the early days of the workshops. The students understood that leaders need help, guidance, advice, suggestions, and trust in the abilities of the group members, and for the leaders to get the help and guidance from members, leaders must accept that contribution coming from the members matter the same. Furthermore, the students' leadership skills grew due to the discussions in the form of reflections and feedback, which created a trusting environment promoting acceptance. By being able to accept each other, students like S12 also accepted that mistakes and negative experiences of the past are things from which one can learn and that through mistakes and experiences, there is a possibility of continuous improvement. Students who go through challenges, listen to each other, and do not focus too much on negative issues are leaders in development who accept and move on. Lastly, accepting the limitations of one's own abilities and accepting constructive feedback also demonstrates how acceptance can enhance one's leadership skills.

After accepting that the students need a leader, the group then moves ahead to *understand* what the leader does. Thus, understanding the need for a leader to enhance leadership skills was the next important thing this group found out. According to S12, she understood that a leader should build equality in the group and allow the members to freely argue with each other:

It also became clear (to me) that leaders need to build an equal group and allow conflicts (S12).

S13 understood the need for equality and further added that the conversation to take place must be meaningful for the group to perform well under leadership. Therefore, it is the responsibility of a leader to create an environment where meaningful conversations can take place on equal terms:

I should consider all opinions and points of view to be equivalent and meaningful (S13).

For S14, tasks such as Paper Clips helped him understand the difficulties occurring for leaders in workplaces where there are more people. A leader must work hard to create a trusting environment that enhances creativity and helps people learn soft skills. Therefore, S14 understood that learning and practising leadership skills

on a smaller scale would help in future when more people are working within an organization:

> *From the activity of paper clips, I realised how important it is to be a leader and how difficult it is to be a leader because the conditions would be more complicated in a bigger organization (S14).*

In short, students realized that leading means understanding the skills of one's teammates and dealing with potential pitfalls that may emerge. For the students understanding meant catering to equality within groups and allowing members of the team to openly discuss any issues or conflicts. Most importantly, the students understood that for a leader it is very important to hear diverse points of view. Furthermore, leadership skills involve creating an atmosphere where people can have conversations, and their opinions are treated with respect. Another aspect of understanding the role of leadership that one student discussed is important to highlight here. The challenges that S14 faced while working on a task made him realize that by practising managing smaller groups it would be possible to deal with larger and more complicated groups in future. Thus, this student understood that to be skilled at leadership one must build trust, encourage creativity, and know how to manage the skills of the members.

Management is the next main factor that students discussed that enhances leadership skills. Management means making sure everyone is participating and that the leader is competent in the subject. It is essential for a leader to learn how to manage groups. During the early workshop days, S14 started a conversation on how to manage bigger groups in an organization as a leader. S12 stated that management can be easy in workplaces if everyone participates. Therefore, a leader must ensure that everyone participates in a group:

> *I must make sure that everybody has the chance to participate in the group (S14).*

A leader should be competent to manage his or her field. A more competent leader can easily manage his or her teams, said S13, who reflected:

> *I can also take with me that a leader should know his task very well. Only if this is the case is he able to push his group members (S13).*

To manage people, one should be clear in giving instructions; if this does not happen, the group loses time and wastes the valuable resources of the organization, according to S14:

> *From the activity of drawing apple shapes, I realize that it is important to be clear about what we want to express, and we should express it precisely. Otherwise, a lot of time and resources would be wasted in an organization (S14).*

A leader is a person who manages the groups well if they give their instructions clearly and know precisely what they want from their team members; otherwise, lots of time and resources can be wasted.

In short, learning to manage others is an important part of practising leadership skills, as the students observed. According to the students, effective management

involves making sure that all the members of a team are actively contributing, which strengthens group dynamics and equips leaders with the expertise required to finish the task. The students, while practicing the role of a leader recognized the importance of managing groups for leadership growth from the experiences that they faced during their practice. One such example is S14's initiative to start a communication dialogue on how to manage large groups in future organizations. Similarly, S12 discussed the importance of creating equal opportunities in order to manage groups effortlessly. S13 stated that good leadership skill practice requires that a leader should be clear in giving instructions (which was also stated by S14), and for that reason, the leader should be the one who is more knowledgeable and competent in the subject matter. S14 further pointed out that practising leadership skills requires that the person in charge should consider ways to reduce or prevent the waste of time and resources. Overall, the students described a skilled leader as an expert in managing teams efficiently, giving clear instructions, promoting participation, and using resources with optimal care.

Lastly, *Growth* came up as an important mindset to have to learn and enhance leadership skills. Growth is the personal development of all the members of the team, including the leaders. Therefore, leaders should keep in mind that they must help everyone learn and grow with experiences that arise during work. S12, who had had not very good experiences with her boss in her previous job, stated that a leader is not always a bossy person, meaning that she now has a new understanding of the leader and his/her role which, which is a sign of her personal growth:

> *I learned that a leader does not have to be a bossy person (S12).*

S13's growth, on the other hand, occurred during one of the discussion sessions. She reflected that to grow one should not be afraid of listening to others and spending time doing so. Even if it is a long and exhausting process, listening to others will only improve one's understanding of others and improve the discussions. Therefore, S13's growth occurred through listening to the opinions of others before moving forward or producing a result. In other words, in S13's opinion, working in a team is better because more ideas and suggestions come up, which enhances the results:

> *I think we should listen to each other better. Even if this is an exhausting and long process. This is the only way we can improve our arguments. By including all opinions and weighing them up, the argument will be better (S13).*

S14's growth came with experiential learning, making him want to take up more leadership roles in future. This is because he used to just work on tasks given to him and did not pay attention to leading his teams in the past. The experience of working as a group leader in the course provided him with first-hand experience of being a leader, which inspired him to become a better leader in future:

> *In the future, I will try to take more leadership roles to improve my leadership skills (S14).*

In short, according to the students, the concept of growth was important for

them to enhance their leadership skills. Having a mindset for growth meant that the students were able to develop their leadership skills on both individual levels as well as on a group level. This was only possible for these students due to their continuing to learn through experiences from tasks, activities, and project work. The students' reflections on their growth help clarify the significant role growth played in the enhancement of their leadership skills: for example, understanding that a leader is not just a person who bosses people around. A leader is a person who is good at listening even if it is demanding and time-consuming. Doing so enhances the team members' understanding of the challenges and makes things easy to discuss in a team. Furthermore, experiential learning also played an important part in the growth of leadership skills for students like S14. His experience as a team leader made him passionate about leading more teams in future jobs. Overall, growth happened for the students when they acted as leaders and focused their attention not only on the development of their leadership skills but also on listening to others and learning from experiences. By doing so, they grew personally, which, in turn, helped enhance their leadership skills.

Summary of Key Findings

The enhancement of leadership skills among the students was shaped by the categories discussed in this section on leadership skills. *Listening* was recognized by the students as a vital skill to have to practise their leadership skills. They understood this because they paid attention to the skills and needs of others and because they accepted and listened to the diverse opinions of their teammates. *Acceptance* was considered a transformative factor by the students as it highlights values such as openness, collaboration, and understanding the fact that mistakes happen, and one can learn from mistakes. *Understanding* the complexities and the ins and outs of group development, group dynamics, and the strengths and weaknesses of individuals as a leader was another important category that the students discussed and that helped enhance their leadership skills. Understanding created an atmosphere of trust, respect, equality, and open and meaningful discussions during project work. Learning to skilfully manage teams, such as creating structured coordination and using the resources at hand, helped the students learn *management*. With skills learned through management, the students were able to guide their teams in completing the tasks at hand, thus learning and enhancing their leadership skills in the process. Accepting and adopting the *growth* mindset also helped the students on their leadership skills enhancement journey. They involved themselves in continuous learning through experiences, challenged their preconceptions by adopting growth, and used experiences of their own and others to learn, and, in the process, growth happened, resulting in continuous learning of leadership skills. Together, the categories discussed by the students contributed to the enhancement of their leadership skills through the various challenges discussed in their reflections

and feedback. These categories inspired the students to collaborate and guided them as a team towards their goals with competence and compassion for one another, thus creating possibilities to learn and enhance their leadership skills further.

Analysis of Key Findings

In Phase I and II students considered listening as an important skill to have to be able to develop their leadership skills. In both phases, the students were asked to take on leadership roles to start practising leadership skills. It was through this practice that they understood the significance of listening. Listening was improved through peer conversations and their inputs, reflections, and feedback, as well as from challenges that arose from taking on leadership roles simultaneously in a few cases. Other factors involved in enhancing leadership skills through listening were decision-making, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of team members, and encouraging collaboration. By working on these factors, the students managed to understand the significance of listening, which, in turn, helped them enhance their leadership skills.

Acceptance was not mentioned in Phase I. Based on my experiences in Phase II there are a few themes that need to be discussed so people can see how acceptance enhances leadership skills. First, acceptance was considered an essential step in developing leadership skills by the students in Phase II because it involves looking for help when needed, accepting suggestions at every step of the way, seeking guidance from teammates when necessary, and promoting openness. Second, acceptance promotes and builds trust and collaboration within teams, which enables leaders to explore diverse ideas. Furthermore, trust and collaboration are not complete unless leaders accept constructive feedback regularly from teammates and team members. Third, acceptance brings constant learning and growth. The students understood while practising their leadership skills that those leaders who accept that mistakes happen and that mistakes are learning opportunities show a commitment to constant improvement. Fourth, acceptance is entwined with listening and inclusivity. The connection between listening and acceptance enables leaders to value contributions made by members of the group. This also helps leaders to see the leadership abilities of other members of the group. Knowing the skills of the other members of the group, leaders can then create equal opportunities for members to grow and take on leadership roles, thus creating inclusivity.

Understanding was mentioned as an important factor in enhancing leadership skills by students in both Phases I and II. The students recognized that in order to enhance leadership skills it is important to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the people with whom one is working. The first introductory session with the creative introduction was the first time the students thought about getting to know the skills of the people they were to start working with soon. Thus, comprehensive understanding is the first key point in enhancing one's ability to

learn leadership skills. Second, the students realized the importance of equality when it comes to group work. Understanding means that a leader creates equality among members of a group, is open to feedback and general discussions, and values diverse ideas. Third, leadership skills enhancement requires an open and inclusive atmosphere where anyone can have a meaningful conversation and can share ideas without judgment. Fourth, a leader must be ready to learn from challenges. In any given group work, there is always challenges to overcome. Furthermore, working on challenges in a smaller setting helps people deal with complicated challenges on a larger scale, as mentioned by S14. Overall, the enhancement of leadership skills requires a person to be an effective communicator, decision-maker, motivator, and willing to keep learning.

Management was not mentioned in Phase I, thus here I will discuss a few of the main findings from Phase II that describe how management can be effective in enhancing people's leadership skills. First, management requires leaders to ensure participation and contribution from all the members of the group. This not only increases bonds between group members but also can give leaders a stage where tasks can be accomplished with higher success rates. Second, managing groups gave the students practical experiences that helped them grow their leadership skills even further. Lastly, practising leadership skill requires that a person who is taking up a leadership role should be very clear in giving instructions and be learned in the subject matter. Thus, to manage a group and be good at leadership skills one must be clear on goals and competent to reach the goals using his or her team.

Growth was mentioned by student in both phases of this research as an important category in enhancing leadership skills. Here I will discuss growth and analyse different factors that helped enhance the leadership skills of the students. First, growth is a skill development for individuals and groups. Therefore, when I use the term *growth*, I mean growth for both individuals and groups. The students understood that their personal growth and development as leaders were connected to the growth of the whole group. Second, growth meant that the students had to continue learning through their experiences. This means learning from tasks, activities, and project work. Learning from experiences provided the students with an atmosphere in which they were able to refine and expand their skills, including leadership skills. Third, the perception of what a leader is was effectively changed for the participating students. The shift in leadership mindset helped them grow and change their perceptions of leadership and leadership skills during the course. They understood through experience that leading is not a matter of putting pressure on others but is a question of how well a leader can listen to others, understand their opinions, and allow active and meaningful discussions.

Lastly, growth is a change in mindset to overcome hesitations. The students had to come out of their comfort zones and overcome their hesitations to be able to grow and enhance their leadership skills. In the beginning, the students came

with their understanding and perceptions of what they might do during the course. Understanding that they had to change their mindset and that they would be learning by doing to enhance their soft skills was the first step in their growth. The students overcame their hesitations by taking on leadership roles and by challenging themselves and each other, and most importantly through the feedback they understood that they would have to take ownership of their actions to be able to keep growing and enhance their leadership skills in the process of learning.

6 A SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS IN BOTH PHASES

My research is focused on enhancing the employability super skills of students, specifically skills in communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership. My choice of these skills was based on research by Kinash et al. (2015) and Kinash and Crane (2016), who refer to the skills as super skills. To conduct my research, the Educational Design Research EDR model was used. This model is based on an iterative process. Two iterations were used (See Figure 4 in Section 3.2). The following is the Research Question I examined through the EDR process: Can and to what extent students' super skills of employability (communication skills, motivation/initiative skills, and leadership skills) be enhanced using feedback, reflection, and experiential learning workshops?

This led to two objectives for this study: to test how employability super skills can be enhanced for the participating students and to create a model that universities can use to enhance the soft skills of their students. In the following section, I will summarize the key findings about the enhancement of super skills, followed by an introduction of the model I have created based on my findings. A basic assumption is that the students are already familiar with the super skills to some extent and my model is not so much about the acquisition but, indeed, about the enhancements of these skills. The key findings are combined from the two phases (iterations) and are discussed according to the super skills in question, starting with the communication skills category.

6.1 Enhancement of Employability Super Skills

6.1.1 Communication Skills

Through the analysis of communication skills categories in Phases I and II, four key findings contributed to the enhancement of the students' communication skills during my research. The key findings are related to the use of effective listening, building trust, reflection, and inclusion. These categories or key findings had an impact on the enhancement of the communication skills of the students and will be discussed next.

First, the task selection which was done keeping in mind the objectives and aims of the study helped the students identify the importance of active listening during workshop days (Mustapha, 2023). Students in both phases stated that doing tasks to learn and practice super skills created opportunities to understand the importance

and significance of active listening. By continuously engaging in tasks and activities that demanded active listening and attention, the students learned the value of listening over speaking. This is why active listening became an essential foundation for communication skills enhancement during both phases of my research. It is because the students learned to listen to understand each other better instead of listening to argue with each other. In my analysis, listening to understand each other helped them grow and improved their communication skills. Furthermore, this prioritization of speaking less and listening more was an important learning outcome for the students in this research. This approach, which was discussed in both phases, proved important in promoting the communication skills of the students. They understood that by paying attention, focusing on listening, and speaking less, they could better grasp the perspective of other students' comments, suggestions, and ideas to enhance their collaboration. Speaking less and listening more also reduced the fear of judgement and created an environment favourable for learning and practising communication skills.

Second, trust-building was an important key factor for students when it came to enhancing their communication skills. Trust-building was a central part of the discussions in both phases. In Phase I, trust was mostly understood through autonomy, which allowed the students to develop trust in their abilities and the abilities of their peers. In Phase II, however, trust building mostly occurred through participation, the ability to freely express oneself without being judged, and collaboration. Trust made it easy for the students to share their ideas, suggestions, and thoughts freely, which promoted a deeper sense of belonging to the group. Trust, furthermore, helped the students to not hold back and give their full attention and support to the group.

Third, reflection emerged as an important key finding that not only acted as an important tool in conducting workshops, but also helped the students understand the importance of communication, thus enhancing and refining their communication skills. By doing self-reflections and sharing experiences in their groups, the students attained a deeper know-how of their styles of communication. To put it simple, the students were able to understand how to communicate. They had to keep in mind that everyone thinks differently; therefore, it is not an easy task to bring different people with different ways of thinking towards a common way of thinking. Reflection also made it clear to the students that there is more than one solution or perspective on any given situation. Through reflections, the students were able to accept different points of view during their group work on the final project, which enabled them to combine their ideas (the DECM Model). By reflecting and learning from the experiences of each other, understanding and respect grew among the students, which, overall, enhanced their communication skills.

Lastly, inclusion was also mentioned in both phases as an important key factor that enhances communication skills, according to the students. Due to inclusion

the productivity of their groups increased. Inclusion also improved individual productivity. Apart from the increase in productivity, inclusion also helped foster collaboration. Together both collaboration and productivity helped the students enhance their group dynamics, resulting in better communication. This realization was further enhanced when the students started to build confidence in the abilities of each other by asking for help with their tasks. Inclusion also helped the students to recognize that there is value in listening to different points of view and showed the students how they could take advantage of the abilities and skills of their teammates.

In both phases the influence of active listening, trust-building, reflection, and inclusion on the enhancement of communication skills of the students was comprehensive. These key findings worked in unison to allow the students to become proficient communicators, which also gave them the ability to face and deal with diverse ideas and perspectives during their group work. As a result, they were able to collaborate more effectively with other in less time. These key findings also helped the students create inclusive and constructive communication without fear of judgment.

6.1.2 Motivation and Initiative Skills

Detailed analysis of the students' progress in learning motivation and initiative skills in both phases highlights the importance of a few key factors that enhanced the motivation and initiative skills of the students in this research. To enhance these super skills of motivation and initiative the essential factor is cooperation, according to the results in both phases. Cooperation created an atmosphere that promoted trust and understanding among the students, leading them to work together (motivation) openly and freely and actively engage (initiative) in conversations and group work without any judgment or personal biases from peers from the very beginning of the course. The calming atmosphere, based on understanding and acceptance of collaborative interactions among the students, enhanced the students' individual as well as group development, resulting in learning and practicing of motivation and initiative skills throughout the course.

Furthermore, for motivation and taking initiative to happen it is important that a person is willing to participate. Participation played an important role in enhancing the students' super skills of motivation and initiative. With a supportive atmosphere and willingness to work, the students were focused and actively engaged in their tasks, activities, and group work. As a result, they had enough time and motivation to practise and refine their super skills. A central theme or key factor that acted as a bond between the other key factors mentioned here is acceptance. Accepting one another freed the students from unnecessary judgments and fights/arguments. As a result of accepting others, the students were able to move higher in their group development stages (the IMGD model) during the course. Students who were afraid of judgment and felt intimidated by others actively motivated and supported each

other once they saw that their ideas were welcomed and that the others had accepted them. Observing this pattern, it is safe to say that acceptance served as a medium that allowed the students to work on their motivation and initiative skills.

The last two factors – preparation and experiential learning – helped the students understand their present and future responsibilities as well as helping them acquire motivation and initiative skills. During the course the students needed to be prepared for the group work, to be able to share and participate, especially as leaders. By coming to class prepared, the students were able to understand how and why to take on ownership, responsibility, and leadership. They did so to create an environment for growth and skills development. The understood that in future, the challenges and tasks they face will be more difficult, but by learning through their experiences in the course, sharing their experiences, and practising they will be ready to face real-world challenges. Thus, experiential learning practice during the course helped them understand challenges such as active listening, open-mindedness, focus, patience, and collaboration. By understanding and preparing for future challenges through experiential learning, the students were able to stay on track and practice motivation skills; furthermore, they took the initiative to keep on learning and motivating others while also looking forward to meeting new challenges of their own in the future.

In conclusion, the five key factors discussed here are intertwined, and together these factors contributed to the enhancement of the students' motivation and initiative skills. Each factor contributed to creating an atmosphere that encouraged the students to practise their skills, empower each other and themselves, and grow as individuals and most importantly as a group. As a result, I observed that the students were committed to helping others and engaging in conversations, collaborations, and taking leadership roles, which enabled them to stay motivated and take initiatives to not only enhance their soft skills but help others enhance their soft skills as well.

6.1.3 Leadership Skills

For the students in Phases I and II, listening as a leader meant more than just hearing others. The students learned the importance of paying attention to others' ideas, suggestions, and experiences. Listening evolved into deeper conversations on ideas during the project days; these conversations enabled the students to dig deep into the meaning of leadership skills by solving issues like team dynamics and challenges together, discovering insights into the minds of their teammates, and reinforcing the foundations built by others through effective decision-making. Listening to others allowed the students to practise their leadership skills.

The transformation of the students' leadership skills emerged when they started to accept each other's ideas and contributions. Acceptance meant that the students felt comfortable in seeking help and guidance from one another. The students who were acting as leaders to practise their leadership skills accepted the fact that there were diverse points of view and showed courage in accepting their mistakes

during the group work when their point of view did not match with the those of the others. The support that the leaders received enabled them to create a healthy and safe environment of trust leading to more valuable discussions. The students also accepted that while they were working together, they would put their issues aside or discuss them enough to make sure that nothing interfered with the they had gathered to do. Thus, working on acceptance helped enhance the leadership skills of the student leaders.

Understanding, another important leadership skill learning factor, helped the students grasp team members' capabilities in a very short time. Grasping capabilities means that the students understood each other's roles. The student leaders knew the skills of the members of their group and utilized these skills according to the needs and requirements of the group's tasks. Understanding helped the students remain on equal terms with each other and deal with each other on an equal basis. Understanding also helped the students keep an open and trusting discussion going throughout the course and especially during their projects. Understanding enriched the leaders with the capability to lead their groups in harmony and united them all in working towards a common goal, which was to finalize the project work and present it, along with their process of learning super skills.

A key factor of management which was not mentioned as something of significance in Phase I but was mentioned in Phase II became a rather important factor in terms of practicing leadership skills. Being able to manage teams increased team spirit and helped the leaders utilize the group's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses to reach the goals discussed in Section 5 of the results for Phase 2. The leaders' management and facilitation of experiential learning enabled them to deal with the ins and outs of managing the soft skills of their fellow students. This practice resulted in well-rounded leadership skill mastery for all the students as it was required that every student take on a leadership role to practise their leadership skills.

Finally, growth is a main factor for the enhancement of leadership skills discussed by the students throughout both phases. It is clear that the students closely followed the group development stages and worked hard to move up the ladder of the IMGD model of group development. I observed that the students focused more on group development than on their individual development, thinking that group success was also their personal success. When it came to leadership skills growth, some students abandoned their preconceived notions about leadership and changed their minds about who leaders are and what leaders can do. This growth helped the students support inclusivity and empathy towards one another, and in the process, they learned important leadership skills.

In conclusion, detailed analysis of the super skills through the main findings in Phase I & II provides a clear and transformative outcome showcasing that the use of workshop-based courses helped enhance students' super skills. In the case of communication skills, the enhancement happened through listening, which

helped the students establish a trusting atmosphere that supported their sharing and collaboration. The students' motivation and initiative skills were enhanced the most when the students started cooperating in their groups. This led to the building of understanding and acceptance, which allowed active engagement among the students. Finally, the leadership skills of the students were enhanced when experiential learning and reflection were understood and practised. The students continued to practise leadership skills as they progressed in their project work, and during this time their reflection and experiential learning helped them better understand leadership skill factors such as inclusion, understanding, and management. These factors helped the students continue to refine their leadership skills. The insights of this study through my analysis show that the students' super skills were enhanced with the use of workshop-based courses in both phases through reflective practices, feedback, and experiential learning.

6.2 The Model for Enhancing Employability Super Skills

This research has discussed in detail the ways student employability super skills were enhanced using workshop-based facilitative courses. After carefully considering and analysing different models of employability, I decided to go with Poll and Sewell's two models: USEM and careerEDGE. Pool and Sewell's 2007 models USEM and CareerEDGE at the time helped researchers understand how well they could enhance the employability of their students. However, these models had some limitations and strengths, which were discussed in Section 2 of this thesis. Based on the theoretical research done in the thesis and my empirical findings, I developed a model for enhancing employability super skills in universities (see Figure 6 below). This model is named SkillCraft: A Curiosity-Enhanced Employability Super Skills Model SCESS. The name SkillCraft was created by combining two words, 'skills and craft', referring to the practical learning approach for employability super skills enhancement with the use of reflection, feedback, and experiential learning.

The proposed SCESS model requires first and foremost a conceptual understanding of employability. Concepts taken from the USEM model – understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition – and CareerEDGE – self-dependence and self-confidence – all help to clarify the skills that are needed for employability. To train students to learn these super skills I added practical strategies (tasks, activities, reflection, feedback, and experiential learning workshops) to the SCESS model which I then implemented in the EDR research phases of this study. The concepts used in the model enhance the employability of students overall as these concepts promote the learning of skills such as communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership as discussed in the Results sections for both Phase I and

Phase II (Chapters 4 and 5). The SCESS model derived from the research (Fig.6) allows students and teachers to develop their skills by following the detailed process described.

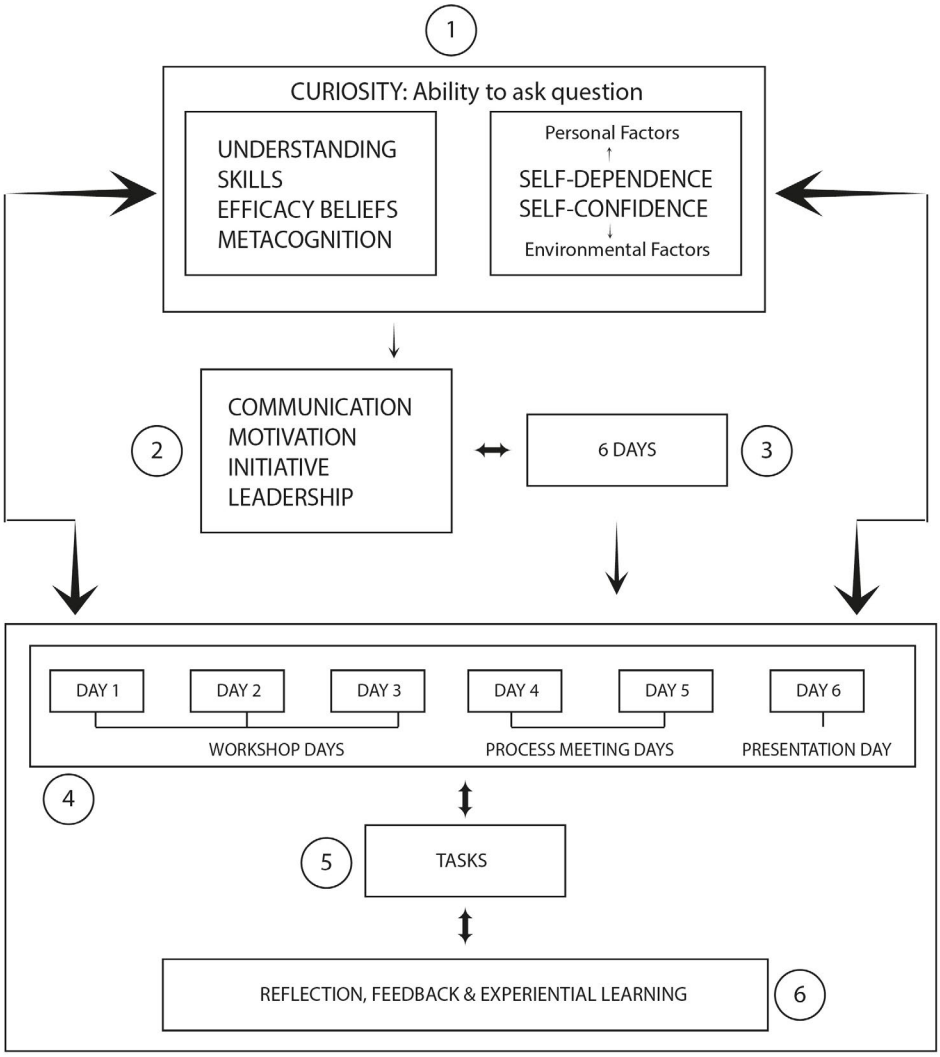


Figure 6 SkillCraft: A Curiosity-Enhanced Employability Super Skills Model SCESS.

This SCESS model is designed for teachers and educational institutes to copy and implement in their own ways. Section 1 of the model starts with the core beliefs based on two previous employability models: the USEM model and the CareerEDGE model by Poll and Sewell (2007). Furthermore, in Section 1, I stressed the importance of curiosity, defined as the ability to ask questions. I used a principle

taken from the basics of facilitation, which is that knowledge is not given, it is taken. Curiosity encouraged the students in my course to actively engage in their groups and with me by asking questions. I made sure that they practiced being curious, and one example of this is reflection. When they asked themselves questions to answer their reflections, they were displaying curiosity. In my experience, asking questions keeps the mind focused and ready to learn and understand. Furthermore, knowledge is built on the motivation to ask questions (Borah, 2021), and without the motivation to ask questions the students in my course would not have learned so much about super skills, let alone enhanced these skills. Another reason to add curiosity to the model is to encourage students to ask questions about things that seem complex or are unknown to them and discuss them till they achieve understanding, especially while working in groups. Therefore, in the SCESS model curiosity is what binds core beliefs and methods to achieve results, which in this case is to enhance super skills.

Section 2 of the SCESS model is dedicated to the aims of the course. In this research I aimed to enhance four super skills of the students; hence I used this section 2 to achieve my aims. This is the section which can be replaced with other aims. This means that the SCESS model can be integrated into any subject being taught in universities and schools because, in the context of education, different teachers can adopt the model to meet the aims of the subject they are teaching. For example, teachers who are teaching media studies can adopt the reflection, feedback, and experiential learning approaches that I used to enhance the soft skills of their students while teaching media studies courses. Students will then have the opportunity to enhance both their hard and soft skills. This is why I said that Section 2 of the SCESS model is replaceable.

Section 3 represents the number of contact teaching days. The number of days may be changed depending on the implementation. In my university, for a 3-credit course, six days for contact teaching was deemed sufficient. In between the six contact days, there can and should be group meetings as was done in my course.

Section 4 represents the further break-down of the six days. The first three days are workshop days. Days 4 and 5 were designated as process meeting days. Students came in to discuss their process or journey thus far. An alternative for other teachers using this model would be to discuss the content the students are working on alongside discussing the process. The idea is to have meetings with the students and clarify issues that they might have during the course instead of at the end of the course. The last Day 6 is presentation day or feedback day.

Section 5 explains tasks and activities that can be used during the six days. In my case, I used tasks and activities as a base so that the students could reflect on their experiences and give each other feedback to learn from each other's experiences. In other cases, instead of tasks and activities, teachers could use reading that students have to do and set aside some time for reflections, feedback, and experiential learning discussions.

Lastly, Section 6 focuses on reflection, feedback, and experiential learning. This means that Section 6 is implemented at the end of each task and activity on each day. In short, after each task, students do reflection, give each other feedback, have conversation or discussions, and have some sort of experiential learning before moving on to the next task. The repetition throughout each day helps students remain curious and achieve their aim, which in my course was to enhance student employability super skills.

Next, I will compare my SCESS model with USEM (Pool & Sewell, 2007) and CareerEDGE (Pool & Sewell, 2007) to highlight the new insights that arise from my research. The implementation of the SECSS's model, with my addition(s) to USEM and CarrerEDGE's core beliefs, allowed me to use theory and practice at the same time to help students practice their super skills.

My research focuses on super skills, such as communication skills, for the enhancement of employability, which is similar to the USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007), who also discuss and emphasize the retention of skills such as expertise in academic, management, and general presentation. In my research findings, positive feedback and reflection contributed to the enhancement of the efficacy beliefs and metacognition of the students. The fact that positive feedback and reflection contributed to the enhancement of self-dependence (personal factors) and self-confidence (environmental factors) and their connection with efficacy beliefs and metacognition: self-dependence is like reflection and self-confidence is like positive feedback. These similarities between these terms help us understand that the students' efficacy beliefs and metacognition are enhanced through personal factors and environmental factors, which means that these factors were enhanced through practice. In Section 2 of this thesis, I stated that metacognition is the knowledge of efficacy and the ability to learn, think, and implement in groups to solve problems. In other term, metacognition describes in theory what students aim to achieve, and reflection is the tool students use in practice to achieve their aims of enhancing their super skills. The USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007) propose trust and collaboration, and the model I propose here also promotes trust and collaboration (key findings) to enhance the communication skills of students.

In my research cooperation and acceptance were key findings among others in enhancing the motivation and initiative skills of the students. In my new SCESS model, the role of acceptance is similar to the self-confidence and efficacy beliefs part of the core of my model (the section 1). When students feel accepted, and their ideas are listened to and welcomed, their self-esteem (part of efficacy beliefs) and self-confidence (Poll and Sewell's [2007] CareerEDGE model) improve positively, resulting in enhanced motivation and initiative skills (see the Results and Discussion section). Furthermore, two other main qualities which were found to be crucial in my research, participation, and experiential learning, similar to the concept

of efficacy beliefs. Participation is similar to the concepts of self-dependence and self-confidence as these both give students the confidence to actively take part in activities, reflect on those activities, and give positive feedback to each other, resulting in enhancing the motivation and initiative skills of the students, as discussed in the Results and Discussion sections. Lastly, experiential learning, which is also one of the main key factors in the motivation and initiative skills category, is similar to the metacognition part of my SCESS model: i.e., the learning of experiences and implementing them. This provides me with another reason to choose the USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007) as the core of my new SCESS model.

Many of the main findings concerning leadership skills in both phases of my study are supported by the core concepts of my new SCESS model. Listening and Understanding were the two important leadership skills discussed most often by the students. These main findings of leadership skills align well with the understanding and metacognition of Poll and Sewell (2007). The other findings concerning leadership skills – acceptance, growth, and collaboration – align well with USEM's efficacy beliefs. Management and Taking Charge, two leadership skills found to be important in my research, align with the Skills part of the USEM model. This means that leaders are skilled in taking charge and managing teams. Apart from efficacy belief my research finding growth is also connected with the self-dependence and self-confidence part of the SCESS model.

In Table 12 below, I compare my SCESS model with the USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007). The comparison deals with the super skills and how they are linked to the USEM and CareerEDGE models. In short, my research shows, through comparison, that these three models are connected and address the super skills students worked on during this research work. All three models stress the importance of having core efficacy beliefs and metacognition. My SCESS model's strength lies in the use of tools such as feedback and reflection to enhance these communication skills in students.

Efficacy beliefs, metacognition, self-dependence, and self-confidence are the core concepts used together with the input from my SCESS model's main findings of cooperation, acceptance, participation, experiential learning, feedback, and reflection in enhancing the motivation and initiative skills of the students. By stressing the role of cooperation, acceptance, participation, experiential learning, feedback, and reflection with the core beliefs of efficacy beliefs, metacognition, self-dependence, and self-confidence derived from the USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007), the motivation and initiative skills of the students in my course were enhanced.

Lastly, in Table 12, the comparison between my SCESS model and the USEM and CareerEDGE models by Pool and Sewell (2007) shows a close connection/ relationship between the core beliefs and main findings in the leadership skills

categories. The main factors of listening, understanding, acceptance, growth, collaboration, management, and taking charge provided a comprehensive understanding of leadership skills.

My SCESS model's contribution is to offer a practical solution to higher education institutes in enhancing the soft skills of the students. My model uses feedback, reflection, and experiential learning approaches to enhance the super skills of the students. My model is not only equipped with a theoretical basis, but it also provides practical ways to enhance students' soft skills. The multifaceted nature of my SCESS model is, thus, a valuable resource for teachers, researchers, HEIs, and students who want to enhance their soft skills during their education.

Table 12 Comparison among the USEM, CareerEDGE and my SCESS Models

Super Skill	**USEM (Pool & Sewell, 2007)**	**CareerEDGE (Pool & Sewell, 2007)**	**SCESS model**
Communication Skills	Efficacy Beliefs, Metacognition	Self-Dependence, Self-Confidence	Feedback, Reflection
Motivation and Initiative skills	Efficacy Beliefs, Metacognition	Self-Dependence, Self-Confidence	Cooperation, Acceptance, Participation, Experiential learning, Feedback, Reflection
Leadership skills	Understanding, Skills, Efficacy Beliefs, Metacognition,	Self-Dependence, Self-Confidence	Listening, Understanding, Acceptance, Growth, Collaboration, Management, Taking charge

My research and the models I have discussed focus on the enhancement of students' super skills on an individual basis, but to some extent the enhancement of group development was also observed. The research and models mentioned do not focus on systemic factors that affect the employability of individuals, as discussed in the literature review. Factors such as discrimination, market trends, and access to resources, though important, were not the focus of my research. However, they are factors that can limit the ability of an individual to keep or secure employability.

Employability is a complex problem, as has been discussed in this research. I acknowledged that the models proposed through my research and in the background, research do not guarantee successful employability. The models discussed and

proposed in this research only contribute to a holistic process. Furthermore, the context of the research I have conducted is somewhat limited. The research was conducted in one university and focused on students in two faculties. Therefore, the model might need some adjustments to suit other types of organizations.

Lastly, the research is not longitudinal, so I can draw only limited conclusions concerning the long-term impact of the course on the sustained employability of students and what sort of growth can be achieved through the practices implemented during the course on a long-term basis in HEIs. Longitudinal research would provide enough data to see the effects of the course on a bigger scale in HEIs.

In short, students can greatly benefit from using the learning-by-doing approach embodied in my SCESS model and can continue to practise their learning in the future. My research and the discussion of results show that this SCESS model is a valuable resource that not only helps identify some major components of employability but also provides steps that students can take to enhance their soft skills in general and super skills in specific while studying in HEIs.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses recommendations based on the practical and theoretical contributions of my research. This chapter also discusses my process of using EDR and the reliability of my research. I conclude this chapter with suggestions on how to apply my EDR model and ideas for further research.

7.1 Enhancing Employability Skills Through the Process of EDR

Through Educational Design Research EDR and its iterative nature, I was able to understand and refine my course for my students in phase II. EDR is based on learning from one experience to another, which is how I facilitated the learning of four super skills in practice for my students. They learned from one task through their reflections, then shared their reflections with others. This sharing resulted in experiential learning: learning from one experience and implementing the learning in the next task. The students practised reflection, feedback, and sharing of experiences during the first three workshop days and then practised it while working on their projects, which resulted in constant learning and refining, which is a good example of EDR in practice.

EDR, furthermore, helped me enhance the educational delivery of the course in the second iteration. I used EDR because it helped me understand the difference between theory and practice as well as helping me understand how I could help my students practise their super skills. To provide opportunities for practice, I incorporated my facilitation approach using reflection, feedback, and experiential learning along with tasks and activities. This completed my theoretical and practical method of enhancing the employability super skills of the participating students.

Next, I used the EDR method approach to analyse what I did and why during my research and discuss briefly key issues and needs for providing students with employability soft skills in universities. I will also summarize the key findings from Phase I and II. This will allow me to show the new knowledge that has resulted from my study.

My previous experiences working as a facilitator in a high school in Sweden, working with university students during the past seven years at the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences, as well as working with teachers at Sami University in Norway, have all contributed to my interest in training students in soft skills. My previous experience with students has also highlighted

the need for such soft skills training for both students and teachers. This interest culminated in the course that I designed to gather data for my research on enhancing super skills for employability among students. In this research, I focused on students only though.

Through the EDR process, my research yielded two design solutions in the two phases of the research. In the first phase, four re-design needs emerged and can be considered my first design solution. After the implementation of the first design solution, the second design solution emerged in the form of the SCESS Model for enhancing the soft skills of students in HEIs.

Sections 4 and 5 highlight the results of my study. Section 4 discusses the Phase I findings for each of the super skills. Based on the discussion related to the main findings in Section 4, the EDR process was refined with four additional changes to the course content (the first design solution).

Based on the first design solution, I was able to refine my course for the second iteration in Phase II. The key findings are discussed in detail in Section 5, where I discuss the differences between the findings for Phase I findings and the findings for Phase II. Section 6 further summarizes the findings for Phase I and II. The findings are discussed for each of the four super skills separately.

The outcome of the second design solution is the SCESS model (presented in Figure 6). The model is divided into six sections; each section is connected in one direction or both directions, as can be seen in Figure 6. It starts with Curiosity – the ability to ask questions, reminding teachers to let the students ask them questions. The model consists of core beliefs and interchangeable sections. This model is flexible, and educators can add their own aims and use this model to implement it in their fields. Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the SCESS model, where students can learn and practice using reflection, feedback, tasks, activities, and experiential learning, should not be altered. The process should remain the same, but the content can be changed according to the need.

The SCESS model, which is a combination of my experiences during the study and the results from the two phases, could not have been created if it were not for the students who continuously gave me feedback throughout the course. The course provided students autonomy that kept them motivated, and it was this motivation that the students used to help me come up with the second design solution. Lastly, my observation notes also helped me understand the needs and requirements the students mentioned, and that knowledge was distilled into the design solution model (Figure 6).

Based on the Educational Design Research process discussed here, and the main findings based on the four super skills that are discussed in Results Sections 4 and 5, as well as in Sections 6 and 7, a domain theory of educating employability skills can be formed. This domain theory contains analysis, design and evaluation of the key findings using the EDR process and is derived from this research's key findings

concerning super skills from the two phases. This domain theory also discusses limitations and implications that students need to overcome through education to be able to enhance their employability super skills.

Domain Theory: Enhancing Employability Skills Through Education

To fully explore domain theory, I will summarize the EDR process starting with context theory.

1. **Context theory: Understanding the prospects of employability skills in higher education**

I have argued that employers are the ones who prioritize what soft skills they require according to the job offers (Kinash et al., 2015; Kinash & Crane, 2016). One important factor that employers agreed on in Kinash et al.'s (2015) was the importance of soft skills in their research. Employers are now requiring the employees they hire to have soft skills. Thus, the need to train students in soft skills has been raised. Another issue is the gap between what is being taught in higher education and the skills that are required by employers (Kinash & Crane, 2016): students are graduating but missing out on learning essential soft skills. I have bridged this gap by providing students with an opportunity to learn and practice soft skills and a universal model (the SCESS model) that can be adopted and used in any field or subject by educators in HEIs.

2. **Outcome theory: Finding a solution to enhance students' employability skills**

Two design solutions emerged as an outcome of my study. After collecting data and during data analysis, I looked at solutions such as practical training based on workshop-based courses that can enhance student employability. After the first implementation, four changes were made in redesigning the course. The outcome of the first implementation was the first design solution. Based on the second implementation, the second and final design solution emerged. The solution is enhancing curricula in the form of the SCESS model, which has been presented to give students a chance to practise soft skills. Leadership development programs, task-based learning using reflection, and feedback are important future cases where the SCESS model can be used to enhance students' soft skills.

3. **Design Solution: The SCESS Model for enhancing employability super skills**

The second and final design solution based on my research is the SCESS model. The SCESS model emphasizes curiosity and having core beliefs and comes with interchangeable sections. An integral part of the model is to focus on reflection and feedback, providing tasks and activities for the students, and implementing learning which occurs through experiences.

4. **Evaluation: Reflection on the EDR process to improve the employability of students**

To enhance the employability of students it is important that students are given autonomy (Reeve & Cheon, 2021) when making decisions that affect them. If a course evaluation is being made, educators should consider taking input from the students, just as I did during Day 2, when the students came up with evaluation questions. Based on their evaluation questions, the students reflected on their journey, and I was able to evaluate their performance. Furthermore, it is important to receive feedback to improve courses (Castro & Tumibay, 2021), especially experimental courses like mine that focus on enhancing soft skills. I can say with confidence that the design solution in the form of the SCESS Model is an outcome of constant student feedback. I was able to refine my course and come up with a design solution, and the students gained experiential learning and enhanced their super skills through this process.

In short, domain theory suggests that understanding context helps with finding solutions (Jaakkola, 2020). In my study, the design solution is a process model that is universal due to its interchangeable sections, making it suitable to be used by educators in any subject and field. The SCESS model teaches employability super skills in a practical way, giving students a chance to practise and enhance their super skills. By using such a domain theory, higher educational institute can prepare their students for the ever-changing job market because the students will be equipped with the soft skills they need in addition to the hard skills.

7.2 Reliability Discussion

There are many ways of perceiving the reliability of EDR research (McKenney & Reeves, 2013, 2019, 2021; Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019; Uusiautti et al., 2022; Jacobsen & McKenney, 2023). Ascertaining reliability starts with the relevance of the EDR research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2019 & 2021; Uusiautti et al., 2022), which, in the case of my research, is evident from the literature review section. My research is relevant because the importance of having practised soft skills for the sake of gaining employability which I have discussed in this thesis points to the same conclusion. In short, there is a gap in the university education system where students are not provided time to practise soft skills. There is also no option for students to get credits (ECTs) that they can show employers if they have practised their soft skills in my university. My course fills this gap in the university.

The reliability of EDR-based research lies, first and foremost, in following the EDR process itself. My research followed to a systematic EDR approach, which ensured accuracy in methodology and has a direct influence on reliability of the research. Secondly, I ensured the reliability of my process during the research by using reflective practices (reflection, feedback, and experiential learning) throughout the two phases. Regular feedback obtained from the students together with my

observational notes enabled the seamless transition of implementing refined design solutions from Phase I to Phase II. This process of iterative refinement of design solutions into domain theory, due to the received feedback and reflection from the students, enhanced the reliability of the findings of the findings.

Moreover, the reliability of the EDR process is evident from the comprehensive description (of the process) given in this thesis. Each phase of the EDR iteration is explained along with the detailed results. The design solutions of my research that arose from the EDR process all show the practical implementation and reliability of my research. By following all the steps of EDR process to document my findings in the form of design solutions: domain theory and SCESS model provides a clear account of my research process thus showing and supporting reliability of my research process.

My use of the EDR process also entails that I must show how in practice I have reliably used the EDR process. I used facilitative methods and produced a model based on my research results. This combination shows the process of doing EDR research practically and reliably. By using facilitative methods, results were obtained, analysed, and further refined to create the SCESS model. This means that in phase I, I identified four redesign needs and in the next iteration, I was able to come up with the domain theory. The fact that I was able to identify needs and develop theory shows that I was able to follow and implement EDR process reliably.

The model presented in Figure 6 has the potential to be used in HEIs to enhance already existing curricula. Integration of the model into exiting curricula can allow educators to adopt it more widely in their fields. I recommend that teachers use this model so that their students have higher chances of obtaining employability through the EDR process. According to Uusiautti et al. (2022), students' future orientation and abilities to make career-related decisions need support, and my SCESS model provides support in this regard.

When I discussed the various models in this research, I highlighted some limitations, such as their lack of focus on systemic factors. In my SCESS model, as I focused on the enhancement of super skills, I also ignored focusing on systemic factors. This could be considered a limitation of my research work, as while working on to enhance soft skills is essential, addressing systemic factors could provide a more holistic approach to understanding and improving graduate employability. While the 15 participants provided sufficient data through observational notes, reflection, feedback, and interviews to draw meaningful conclusions, the small sample size remains a limitation of this study. Similarly, three iterations of a course would have provided me with the opportunity to collect more interview and observation data, but in this research project, it was possible to have only two iterations of the course.

Finally, the question could be raised, which of the four super skills is the most difficult and the easiest to observe. I am discussing here how my observation was

reliable when it comes to motivation and initiative skills. The communication and leadership skills can be easily observed but observing motivation and initiative skills might raise some questions. For me, discussing skills like motivation and initiative in writing (from my observation) was the most difficult because these two skills are all about emotions and feelings of a person, which are not quite easy to observe, report, and write. For my students, I think leadership skills were the hardest skills to practice. Their comments about leadership skills being something easy changed once they were asked to lead the groups and practice leadership skills, they found it hard to do so. Especially to lead and give feedback as a leader. Mostly they were afraid of confrontations and blowback. The difficulty in practically practising leadership skills highlights the reliability of my observed data, as it aligns with the IMGD model, which also describes the difficulties leadership skills practice brings when it comes to practicing this skill. This is why I think leadership skills practice was the hardest for the students, whereas communication skills practice was the easiest among the four super skills for the students.

In short, I added reliability and transparency to my study by carefully following the iterative process of EDR and its phases/iterations and by including my reflective practices. Describing my process in detail also adds the reliability to my research because this makes it easy to repeat this research in another setting.

7.3 Developing the Model Further

In order to evaluate the success of my research and to promote sustained employability, I need more data and for that, a longitudinal study would be the first choice. Moreover, since my research focused on skills development, to further explore this aspect I could make programs that are tailored to individual needs. This way the research can enhance the strength of students on an individual basis. Students will then be able to improve on the areas that they lack individually and will be motivated and inspired to further improve the soft skills that they lack or are interested in enhancing further.

In my class, I had students from various cultural backgrounds. Having students from many cultural backgrounds may influence the learning and implementation of certain soft skills (Kechagias, 2011). Researchers should look more into this and consider the cultural and contextual effects of using workshop-based courses in educational institutes. Researchers could explore my findings and apply them in their research to understand how diverse contexts and cultures affect the enhancement of soft skills for student employability. Furthermore, researchers could develop frameworks that assess and measure soft skills quantitively. Researchers could use frameworks to measure individual skill development as well as group skill development. Creating standard versions of frameworks that help measure the

enhancement of soft skills would help institutes evaluate students' soft skills, since it is important for employers to see such evaluations on paper.

Furthermore, my model should be tested over a long period by teachers at various levels of education and in various learning environments to provide more comprehensive data; this would also be aligned with Uusiautti et al.'s (2022) suggestion to do longitudinal studies. The reliability and application of the model will further grow due to longitudinal studies. To initiate longitudinal studies on my model and to check my model further, especially by integrating it into other subjects, I contacted one teacher in Media Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland to let me teach the course Diversity in Media Education (5 ECTs). I used the facilitative methods that I used in the second iteration and implemented them in this course. It was very successful, and I did not receive any negative feedback from the students or from the teacher whose course I took over. I did not collect data during the course; thus, I do not have any data to back up my claim. Lastly, I implemented this model in the Lapland University of Applied Sciences three times during the years 2021-2023.The students were from the bachelor's-level Land Survey class and the Machine Learning and Data Engineering class. Since this implementation took place in the University of Applied Sciences, I cannot use data from these courses as my research was focused on university students. I mention this implementation here to show that I have implemented my design solution model in other very different subjects and had no issues integrating my model into those subjects. Another issue that can be raised is that I could have done a third iteration before creating the final design solution. However, in the discussion I had with my supervisors, it was deemed sufficient to have only two iterations. If I must do another iteration, I will implement it in an online setting.

7.4 My Contribution and the Direction of Future Research

In this section I am recommending based on the results some of the way which I think can help students learn soft skills during their education.

7.4.1 Task-Based Learning

In my course, I used tasks and activities as a starting point and then used reflection, feedback, and experiential learning. The combination of tasks and reflective approaches helped the students practice their super skills during my research. Based on the experience, I recommend using task-based learning in HEIs. Tasks like the ones I used can be integrated easily into the curriculum. Research also suggests the use of task-based learning (Sholawati et al., 2022; López Bernal, 2023; Wenas et al., 2023). Adding task-based activities that prioritize active listening and collaboration among students can be a welcome addition to the enhancement

of students' super skills. Businesses have been using workshops on communication and collaboration as part of corporate training for their employees for a long time (Gupta et al., 2022).

7.4.2 Reflective Peer Learning and Feedback

Furthermore, to enhance university curricula, another practical solution based on my findings is to add reflective peer learning, feedback approach, and experiential learning (Theobald, 2021; Qureshi et al., 2023). Reflective peer learning and feedback practices can be implemented in teaching and integrated into the curriculum level so that the student's employability skills are systematically developed during university studies (Jackson & Meek, 2021; Webb et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2022; Mainga et al., 2022). My research showed that experiential learning occurred through reflection (sharing and discussions) as well as through feedback giving and receiving. This also helped the students practise motivation and initiative skills, building of an environment of trust.

7.4.3 Soft Skills Training

Another suggestion that I can make is to develop programs that help enhance students' one soft skill at a time. For example, Leadership development course for students can be implemented based on the SCESS model developed in my research. Such programs (leadership development) have been successful elsewhere (Macdonald et al., 2019; Werstler, 2021) but usually focus more on providing theoretical knowledge with very little practise in the classroom. I recommend that programs like Leadership Skills Training include both theory and practice opportunities.

Universities can develop leadership skills programs separately from other soft skills so that students learn and practice these skills as much as they can before they enter the job market. In my course, leadership skills were learned together with three other soft skills. Seeing how much my students needed to practise leadership skill, I recommend a year-long course dedicated to learning and practising this soft skill to improve students' chances of gaining employability after graduation. The year-long leadership skills training can provide more time for students to continue to practise more. I would add real-life projects and leadership roles for students to practice and learn by doing.

Another suggestion linked to leadership skill enhancement is to provide students with a chance to get access to mentors and coaches. The students in my course were not able to get as much coaching and mentoring from me as much as I would have wished since they had only two process meeting days with me. During those two days, the students were able to discuss their leadership skills and problems that they faced, but there was not enough time for coaching and mentoring. A separate course on leadership skills enhancement could help students work with coaches and mentors from the business world.

I recommend bridging the gap between theory and practice, which will help students gain not only a theoretical understanding but also provide practical know-how that can enhance their employability. Once many teachers start to implement reflective practices and document their results, universities will be able to implement long-term training courses in their curricula.

7.4.4 Bridging Theory and Practice

The main theoretical contribution of my research is that it provides a deeper understanding of the conceptual connection between the employability super skills of communication, motivation, initiative, and leadership. By leaning on experiential learning methods that include reflection and feedback, my research illustrates how these skills can be approached in empirical research. Future research should involve experts to give students more networking opportunities. Students and companies could take part in workshops where topics such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills are discussed. Continuous collaboration with industries is essential and cannot be ignored.

Universities can take into consideration the fact that one-size-fits-all methods of teaching might not be suitable anymore (Bondie et al., 2019; Taft et al., 2019). Using new theoretical approaches can benefit individuals who do not fit into a one-size-fits-all model. My research shows that universities can create courses that cater to the needs of individuals and groups. Students can learn individually as well as in groups. Therefore, new pedagogies are required that include these above-mentioned suggestions.

The findings from my research on employability super skills has given me an insight into how these super skills are connected. Factors like active listening, trust building, reflection and inclusion are present in each super skill. Seeing that these factors are present in all super skills I suggest we can develop a theoretical model that can use the factors that make up super skills and come up with a new theory that can be called on the lines of integrated theory of soft skills. Using this theory researchers can than come up with a soft skills model. This soft skills model can also measure soft skills in the students and this data can then be given to potential employers who can look at the data and make decisions on hiring their new employees.

The findings discussed in the Results section of the four super skills can be further developed into skill development theories. I have taken inspiration from such theories during my research such as Kolb's theory on experiential learning (Kleinheksel et al., 2023) and Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura & Hall, 2018). Both old and new theories can help universities develop soft skills curricula. Doing so will deepen the understanding of how students can learn and retain soft skills over time and enhance their chances of employability.

There is a need for universities to focus on soft skills training so that students have better chances of gaining employability (Nghia, 2019). Universities need to strike a

balance between pedagogies and the inclusion of soft skills training (Martín-Garin et al., 2021).

Lastly, my findings suggest that learning soft skills is a lifelong process and cannot be just a one-time thing (Alex, 2009; Aclan et al., 2016). Researchers can take the knowledge provided by my research and conduct longitudinal EDR research to continually develop and refine strategies. In my research, I was able to use EDR with one refinement. Continuous research into the development and refinement of frameworks and theories related to soft skills will help students continue to enhance their soft skills and have greater possibilities of employment (Remedios, 2012).

In summary, the contribution of my research is its emphasis on the importance of soft skills training in educational institutes with the help of workshop-based courses to enhance employability. The findings from my research provide a way forward for educational institutes to incorporate these findings into new curriculum design, which can include task-based learning, reflection and feedback approaches. Universities should consider creating inclusive environment and develop soft skills development programs like leadership skills.

My next step in developing the soft skills of students on a deeper level would be to focus on each of the super skills and develop semester-long courses for the students to have more opportunities to learn and practice these skills. This step would require funding and integration into already existing structures. I would argue that it all depends on the mindset of the institutes. If the university wants its students to have a better chance in gaining employability, then the university will implement any change that will help the students. Similarly, teachers or researchers if willing to help the students to learn soft skills will make a time to add reflective practices. My research provides some evidence and further research can help the universities make their decisions into integrating courses that can benefit the students in gaining employability.

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APPENDIX 1 – Tasks Descriptions

1 Apple task

The Apple Task[1] focuses on students' ability to analyse their experiential learning experiences. The origin of this task is difficult to establish. It was taken from Hyper Island Sweden, and it is still available on their website (Apple-Drawing Ideation, n.d.). This is a group task and is done with 3-5 members in each group. The task is divided into two parts. In the first part, members are asked to divide a large piece of paper/chart into 36 boxes. During this time members are encouraged to communicate their ideas verbally at first with each other and agree upon a solution before dividing the paper/chart into 36 boxes. The idea is to start the students off by having them listen to other people's ideas without judgement at first and then come up with one solution that everyone agrees with. Secondly, once the boxes are made, participants in their group then are instructed to 'draw apple' where only one person can draw at a time and the rest of the group members must wait and observe. Also, no verbal communication is allowed in the second part of the task. In this task, everyone participates without speaking and only watching and observing. The discussions afterwards in the form of reflection and feedback are where experiential learning occurs, and as a teacher/facilitator, one cannot just move on unless one sees or observes that the students have experienced learning.

2 Divergent and Convergent Model

The Divergent and Convergent Model DCM was used as the framework for having the students learn and practice their super skills. The Divergent and Convergent model is used to start working on an idea and finalizing the idea with a required outcome (Human Centered Design Toolkit, IDEO, 2019). In the book *Human Centered Design Toolkit*, IDEO has mentioned a model which has only two phases Divergent and Convergent. In my opinion, there is another phase, the Exploration phase. Therefore, Figure 7 is a modified version of the 'Divergent-Explore-Convergent Model (DECM).

The process is very simple. It begins with the ideation stage, which is called the Divergence phase. In this phase, students come up with ideas. No one is allowed to comment on or judge the ideas. The students are given a certain amount of time for this phase during the workshop days because of time constraints. Depending on the situation and time, one can spend days or minutes on this stage. Once the ideas are all written down, the students go on to the Explore phase. In this phase, the students

1 https://toolbox.hyperisland.com/apple-drawing-ideation-exercise

will justify their ideas. The reason for this phase is to combine ideas, discard ideas, and narrow down the number of ideas. The time limit will depend on the situation, as in the divergent phase. The last convergent phase is where I place more focus. This is the phase that produces the result. As an example, if in the explore phase, the students have up to five ideas, in the final convergent phase, they have to combine, discard, and narrow down to one final solution or idea. This DECM is, therefore, easy to use and is a structured way of working that is suitable for a workshop-based course. Using this model the students in groups were able to work and produce results in a short period and were then able to spend more time on learning and practicing their super skills.

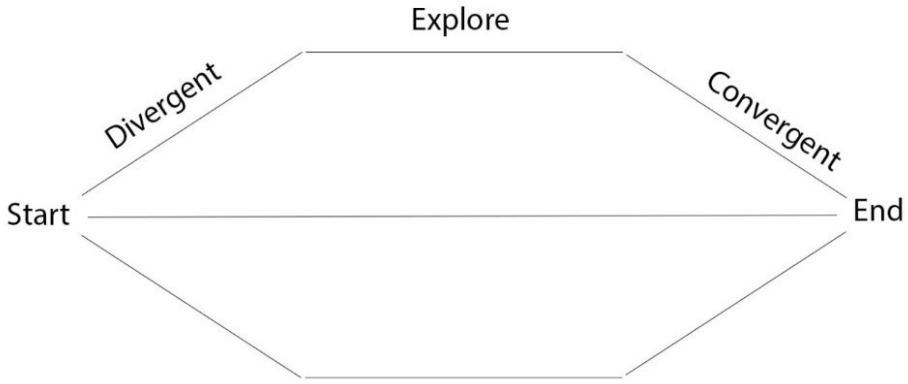

Figure 7 Divergent - Explore - Convergent Model

3 Integrated Model of Group Development IMGD

The Integrated model of group development (IMGD) by Susan Wheelan describes the change in group development and dynamics as well as the maturity of the group over time. The IMGD model was referenced during group work in my course. The groups were encouraged to move through different stages of this model to enhance group development and dynamics.

The stages of the IMGD model are:

- Dependency and Inclusion
- Counter-dependency and Fight
- Trust and Structure
- Performance and Productivity
- Termination

4 Reflection 4Rs

The method (model) of the 4Rs framework: Reporting (Repeat), Relating (Refer), Reasoning (Review), and Reconstructing (Reflect) was chosen because it presents an easy approach to show the differences between what we are saying is actually a reflection or just a summary (Bain et al., 1999; Carrington & Selva, 2010). The 4Rs framework is a strategy that is often used by facilitators, teachers, and coaches, and is also mentioned in research.

In my study, Reflection is done individually as it is one's learning. Then it is shared among pairs and in groups. By sharing a reflection in a group not only do individuals learn more about themselves, but the whole group can also learn from each other's experiences. Sharing in a group helps with group development stages (the IMGD model) as it also builds trust and opens channels of deeper communication.

5 The Paperclip Task

This is a task that challenges the creativity of the students in a very short time and helps them understand how ideas are formed. Teams can practice idea generation, problem-solving, and collaboration by working on this task.

The purpose of the Paperclip task, as used in my study, is to help students understand where they stand on a creative level, idea generation, and learning from each other's ideas. The activity starts by writing down as many uses of a paperclip in day-to-day use as possible in a limited time (max 20 minutes). Once the task has started, the only instruction that students need to follow is to not stop writing till the time is up. This way participants push their thinking and creative capacities to their limits. The task is followed by reflections and discussions and thus reinforces students' soft skills.

6 Making guidelines/rules to follow while working in a group

The many purposes of this task are to help students set their rules/goals/guidelines for the group work to evaluate their performance and keep track of their learning. Students work in smaller groups and come up with the guidelines/rules to be followed in groups and class. Thus, when this task was used in my class, the students followed the Divergent Explore Convergent Model DECM to come up with desired evaluation questions/guidelines. The task ends with reflections and discussions that lead to experiential learning.

7 Lost at Sea task

This task is used as a tool to evaluate psychological abilities of decision-making and risk-taking under pressure situations (Lost at Sea. [n.d.]). Groups can use this task to understand the differences and benefits between working individually and as part of a team.

Groups often perform better than individuals. In my study, the purpose of using this task was to help the students understand the differences between individual work and group work. The task is based on decision-making, and the results can be calculated to see visually who performed better: the group or individuals. From the perspective of learning employability skills, in a very short time, this task helps people understand the importance of working in groups, making decisions together, listening to each other and encouraging equal participation. The task ends with reflections, feedback, and experiential learning discussions about the importance of teamwork.

8 Feedback

Effective Feedback is important when one is working in groups, and it also is an important leadership quality. Regular, good-quality feedback is one of the most important ingredients in building constructive relationships and getting work done. In my course, the purpose of using feedback was to practice feedback skills from various perspectives: how to provide and get, construct and balance, and own feedback.

One method that was used to give constructive feedback started with the following statements:

What I like about you is...

What I want to see more in you is...

This feedback method was practised during class workshop days; the students gave each other feedback in their groups using this method.

9 Content and Process model

This model is used in group development and has many variations. The earliest reference that I can find is from 1951. The model is applied in situations such as small-group problem-solving, decision-making, team design, collaborative learning, team development, and conflict in teams (Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Hackman, 1987; Rohm, 2011; Owen et al., 2022)

The Content and Process model was used in my course to learn about planning and analysing group work and the dynamics of a team from the beginning till the end of the course. The use of the model was considered important because group dynamics affects the atmosphere of a group, communication among group members, working with newcomers in the group, and keeping everybody up to date on the work. Content and Process are parallel to each other and answer two questions: What and How. WHAT are we doing? HOW are we going to achieve results? While the focus is mostly on the PROCESS part of the model in my research, as I was dealing with group dynamics and enhancing soft skills, the CONTENT is as important as process but was given less focus in my course.

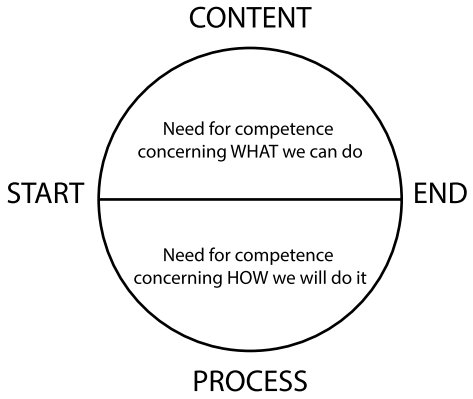

Figure 8 Content and Process model

10 Learning Spiral model

This experiential learning model, the learning spiral, and the next basics of facilitation concepts were introduced to the students to help them understand change and how learning works. As I have used experiential learning myself to enhance my understanding during the EDR process, I deemed it necessary for the students to learn through experiences, and I gave them a learning spiral model. I introduced the students to the learning spiral model so they would understand how they can use experiences and implement them, and I introduced to the basics of facilitation so that they would be ready to accept different ways of learning: i.e., a learning-by-doing approach using reflection, feedback, and experiential learning.

Learning is the outcome of some previous tangible experiences: from previous experience that one has gained one explores and analyses new experiences in a new group and forms abstract concepts. Kolb's experiential learning model, or learning spiral, in its simplified form in Figure 9 best describes the learning cycle of experiential learning that was used as the foundation for analysing learning processes in my course.

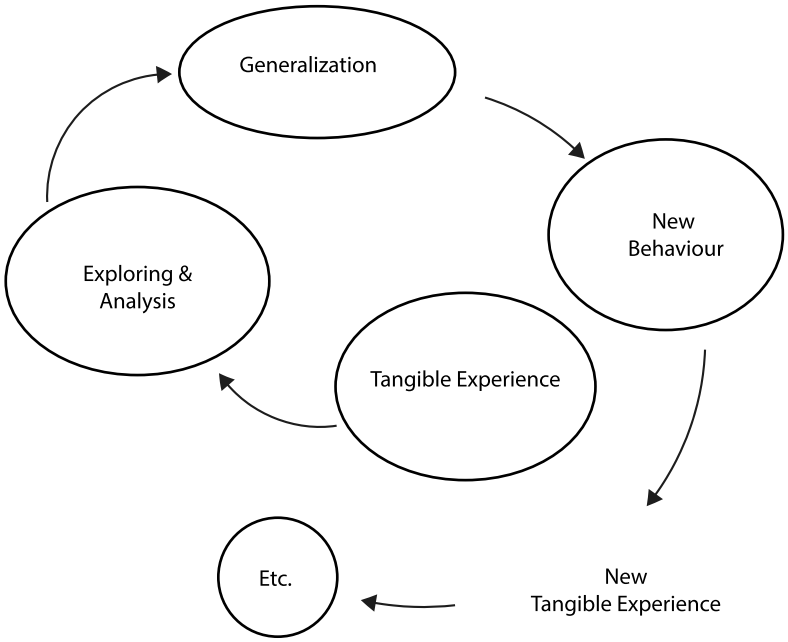

Figure 9 Kolb's Simplified Form of the Experiential Learning Model or Learning Spiral.

11 Base of facilitation

The workshop-based focus during my course is a somewhat unusual approach which required a change in mindset. This change in focus was something odd to do in practice for many participants as students usually focus on content to find their required results. In my course, I considered it important to provide the students with basic information about facilitation to help them understand why I were shifting my focus from content to process. From the perspective of employability super skills, this helped the students start communicating, taking initiative, motivating one another and taking the role of leadership, but most of all it helped prepare them to accept changes and move ahead during the course. Simply put, it helped them be curious and ask questions.

The phenomenon of Change is known as the Base of facilitation. The Base is:

1. Step Away from the "Conveyor Belt" - hierarchies, and linear production models and focus on "something else" (being willing to change/stepping out of one's comfort zone).
2. Learning by doing: a dialogue-based and participatory setting.
3. Knowledge is not given; it is taken.
4. Participation and Climate

APPENDIX 2 – Interview Questions

Interview Questions for the students after the course

Q1 Background information

- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Year of starting studies
- What is your area of discipline of study? Education – Arts – other
- Major/Specialization
- Describe your current student experience in university.
- When do you expect to graduate?

Q2 What opportunities does your university provide you to enhance your graduate employability (*i.e.,* get a job in your field of studies and keep it after graduation from university)?

Q3 Is the responsibility mostly on you to develop your graduate employability skills (*i.e.*, self-initiated) or is this a well-developed and/or formal part of your university experience?

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY COURSE RELATED QUESTIONS
Student's employability skills obtained during the course.

Q4 In this course you practiced soft skills in workshops as well as in the project work. All that time you were asked to reflect on your learning. How well do you think you achieved skills in:

- Communication
- Motivation
- Initiative
- Leadership

Q5 What are the ways of using soft skills that you believe will help you with your employment?
Please explain how in practice these skills will be used by you.

Q6 Now that you have spent some time in other courses have you managed to practice your soft skills?

Q7 To date, what approaches have you taken to enhance your employability soft skills?
What do you think about the course itself?

Q8 Did the course provide you with enough practice to improve your soft skills? Explain how with an example.

Q9 What should be improved about the graduate employability skills that you practised in the course IEDU0010?

Future strategies for using soft skills

Q10 Describe the ways in which you will continue improving your soft skills.

Q11 What attributes, characteristics and transferable skills do you think are important to your employment success?

Q12 Is there anything else that you would like the university to provide to you regarding future employment support in the soft skills category?

Q13 If you were to create a new university-driven graduate employability course, what would it be like?