

# S4B

## Digital soft skills for blended learning

# Report

of

## Focus Group in Portugal



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## **1. Introduction**

The S4B Focus Group, as part of the methodology of the Product number 1- DISCOVERING THE WAY Research report, of the S4B Project, took place on February 7 of 2022. The activity was running after the launch of the initial questionnaire, to a group of two hundred teachers, through which were chosen twenty most relevant soft skills for developing blended learning. The activity was online, at 5 p.m. (WET), using Teams Platform, with ten education professionals, from various levels of teaching, representing multiple subjects, areas of education, and different years of experience.

The participants were chosen from the initial survey, when they had shown interest to be part on the next phases of the S4B and were invited by email and phone calls. The focus group was moderated by Marta Peixoto, from ASDPESO, and Antónia Marinho, a Psychologist who works in one of the schools integrated in ASDPESO, who had the role to explain the differences between soft and hard skills and support the explanations of the concepts related to the 20 soft skills in analyses.

## **2. Methodology and participants profile**

### **2.1. Instrument development and implementation**

The online focus group, run in Microsoft Teams (figure 1) and with the support of MIRO platform (figure 2) [HERE](#), had the purpose to select twelve most important soft skills for blended learning, taking in consideration the experience and knowledge of ten education professionals.



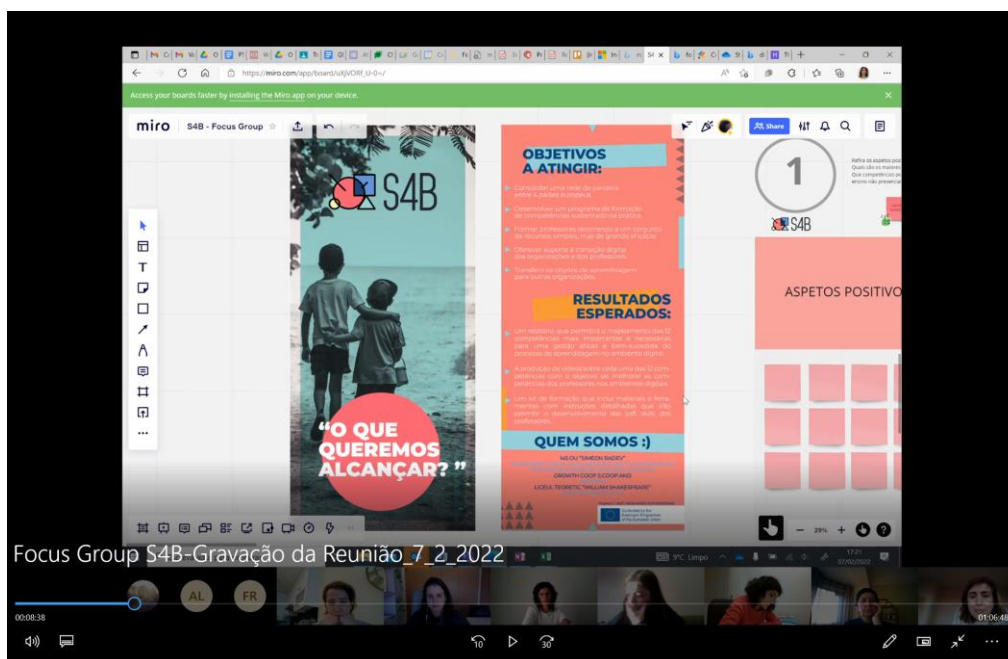


Figure 1 – Microsoft Teams



Figure 2 – Platform MIRO



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So, after a brief presentation of each one and the S4B project, the debate was around the following questions (figure 3):

- What is/are the positive point(s) of the online or blended learning?
- Which are the biggest challenges of the online learning?
- Which skills can be developed, so the teachers can give a good support to the students, in online learning?

The contributions were register in MIRO by each one in MIRO and with that it was possible to know better each one opinion, and analyze different points of view. At the same time, all the participants could also get a better understanding of the subject of the focus group, so these initial questions function like an introduction of the topic.

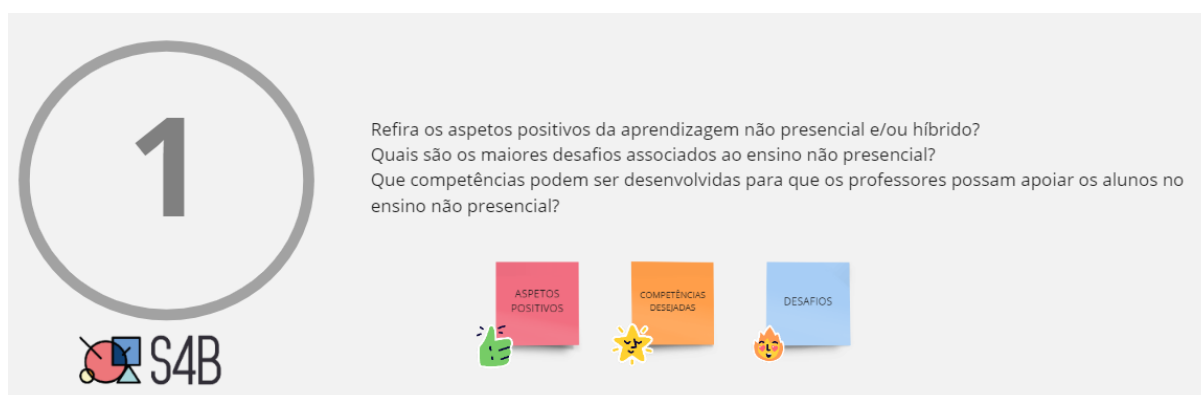


Figure 3 – Questions

After an initial discussion, the twenty most important soft skills, previously chosen, were presented to the participants, with an explanation about what are soft skills and it was also be talked the differences between soft and hard skills. At the same time, there were been take off doubts, for some of the presented soft skills, because their concepts, or some of them concepts could be found very similar to each other and for that reason a clarification was needed (figure 4). Posteriorly, the participants were invited to select, each one, the twelve most important soft skills.

## Distinguindo competências...

### Hard skills



Dizem respeito a um conjunto de conhecimentos e habilidades técnicas específicas inerentes à profissão.



São geralmente adquiridas na formação base do profissional, através do ensino formal.

### Soft Skills

- Dizem respeito a competências transversais, não específicas de determinada profissão, e que não se adquirem, necessariamente, num contexto de educação formal.
- São as competências de comunicação, de relacionamento interpessoal, de inteligência emocional, enfim, implicam o domínio de uma série de habilidades pessoais, sociais e emocionais relevantes.

Figure 4 – slide of a presentation prepared for the activity, distinguishing hard from soft skills.

## 2.2. Focus group details

The focus group took place at 5 p.m., on February 7 of 2022, via Microsoft Teams (online) and it had a length of ninety minutes, accord to the following schedule:

05:00 p.m.	Reception of all the participants;
05:10 p.m.	Introduction to the focus group – presentation of the project S4B and the entities that are part of it;
05:20 p.m.	Discussion about the key skills for the online and blended learning;
05:50 p.m.	Talking about Soft Skills: the twenty most voted through the initial questionnaire; individual selection of the twelve most important soft skills;
06:20 p.m.	Discussion summary/ Final comments;
06:30 p.m.	Closing of the meeting.

After everyone's authorization, the meeting was recorded through and, during the focus group, an interactive board, using the application Miro (figure 5), was used to guide the whole meeting and to support the discussion, as the participants discussed about their main believes of what could be the most important soft skills to support the activities in a blended learning. The access to Miro board was granted, just before the time of the introduction of the focus group and the





his/her vision of Education nowadays, as he/she also explained his/her points of view about what's more motivating and less, in his/her professional activities. In this sense, everyone agreed that the contact, relationship and sharing with students are what's the most motivating actions. In the other hand, some participants related that the bureaucracy associated with their work is excessive, and is one of the main reasons for their tiredness. However, this aspect wasn't consensual, as some other participants said they understand the reason for so and, for them, it makes sense that it is just like that, so they don't feel tired about this component in their jobs.

After this moment, Marta Peixoto presented the S4B project, explaining in detail the finalities, objectives, and partners involved, as well as the objectives of the Focus Group and its structure, sharing, also, the Facebook of the project.

Posteriorly, there was a dynamic discussion about positive point(s) of the online or blended learning, the biggest challenges and skills that should be developed, so the teachers can give a good support to the students, in online learning. Therefore, the participants were invited to write at MIRO platform (figure 6) their opinions. It should be noted that, at this stage, there has not yet been a distinction between hard and soft skills.

In terms of positive points of the online or blended learning, the participants listed the following aspects:

- family involvement,
- students autonomy,
- time to prepare classes,
- a more dynamic evaluation,
- the use of technologies,
- absence of masks and the opportunity to see all faces,
- quick sharing of digital resources with the students,
- more focus during the classes, and
- “the school came home”.

About the biggest challenges of the online learning, the participants wrote the following aspects:

- need for constant adaptation,
- capture students attention,
- emotional management,
- time management,
- the students keep their cameras on,



- the invasion of privacy,
- careful evaluation,
- to create routines in students,
- to know if students are presents during the class and
- synchronized instrumental practice.

Finally, regarding the skills that should be developed, the participants elected the following:

- flexibility,
- plasticity in classroom management,
- creativity,
- motivation,
- participation,
- development of autonomy and
- a more effective time management.

The moderator Marta Peixoto read all the contributions, from which participant could comment or explain his/her opinion, as well as other contributions.



Figure 6 – overview of the participants

The second part of the focus group consisted, in first place, in the explanation of the meaning of hard and soft skills and, in second place, in the presentation of the twenty most voted soft skills through the initial questionnaire. This presentation was leaded by the Psychologist Antónia Marinho, which was available to answer any questions from the participants. On this point, none of the participants had any doubt of the meaning of each presented soft skills.

2



O consórcio identificou o seguinte um conjunto de 20 soft skills. Considerando este grupo de competências, selecione 12 soft skills, utilizando a flor com o seu nome.

#### Como fazer?

1. Procure a flor com o seu nome, copie e cole a flor.
2. Arraste até à competência que considera ser importante no desenvolvimento do ensino não presencial e/ou híbrido.
3. Realize esta operação 12 vezes, até selecionar o total de 12 competências.

**Nota:** a definição de cada uma das competências encontra-se abaixo na tabela.



Descrição das competências:

Comunicação eficaz	Comunicar em ambientes virtuais inclui partilhar recursos, associar ações, colaborar, interagir e participar em comunidades e redes, que vão muito além da mera transmissão de informação.
Gestão de relações	O interesse e a motivação são disposições que permitem estar próximos e permanecer perto dos alunos, estabelecendo relações positivas. As relações com os alunos podem ser muito mais fáceis na sala de aula, no entanto, num ambiente digital, a exigência aumenta na gestão de relações, exigindo a aplicação de novas formas de gerir relações pessoais.
Imersão	Incluir a capacidade de analisar as situações de aprendizagem colocando-se no lugar do aluno e de se associar emocionalmente ao seu processo de aprendizagem, com o objetivo de o transformar num processo fluido no ambiente virtual.
Inovação	Capacidade de integração da tecnologia de forma corajosa, com repercussões nas metodologias de ensino, podendo mesmo levar à criação de novas formas de ensinar com recurso ao digital.
Motivação para o desenvolvimento	Encorajar os alunos a atingir os objetivos de aprendizagem, acompanhando-os incessantemente na aquisição de novos conhecimentos, permitindo o total desenvolvimento das suas competências e atitudes num ambiente híbrido.
Organização e gestão eficiente do tempo	Incluir a capacidade de estabelecer objetivos e prioridades de forma eficaz, definir iniciativas, atribuir recursos e gerir eficientemente o tempo, estabelecendo limites temporais com o objetivo de cumprimento dos objetivos de aprendizagem.
Adaptabilidade	Capacidade de adaptação à mudança. Trata-se da adaptação do estilo de ensino ao novo ambiente virtual. Permite ser capaz de ensinar tendo em atenção as necessidades dos alunos e as características do ambiente virtual.
Resiliência	É a capacidade de responder com sucesso à adversidade, selecionando e utilizando ferramentas apropriadas para a sala de aula. Esta capacidade também é entendida como a capacidade que permite superar situações difíceis, que implicam o recurso à serenidade, tolerância e a autonomia.
Autoconhecimento e autoavaliação	Incluir a capacidade de se conhecer a si próprio, nomeadamente os seus pontos fortes e os fracos, permitindo o desenvolvimento do seu trabalho pedagógico de forma conhecedora num ambiente virtual.
Pensamento crítico	Incluir a capacidade de analisar, sintetizar e avaliar a informação retirada de um ambiente digital de forma ativa e hábil, com o objetivo de procurar uma resposta e chegar a uma solução criativa.
Assumir compromissos	Capacidade relacionada com a vontade do professor na consecução dos objetivos pedagógicos, de forma eficaz independentemente das dificuldades sentidas.
Flexibilidade	Trata-se da capacidade em criar abordagens imaginativas que possibilitem uma adaptação contínua às necessidades dos alunos, implicando ações que requerem flexibilidade, espontaneidade e abertura para mudar, adaptando-se aos novos ambientes.
Gestão de conflitos	A capacidade de lidar e resolver, com tato, conflitos de interesse e relacionais.
Perseverança	Ser capaz de ser persistente e tenaz, aplicando o esforço necessário para fazer algo e continuar a fazê-lo até ao fim, mesmo que seja difícil de o fazer.
Motivação	Trata-se da competência que permite manter a energia e o entusiasmo para atingir os objetivos. A motivação é um fator psicológico importante no trabalho pedagógico, pois permite ao professor ter a força necessária para realizar o seu trabalho pedagógico mesmo num ambiente virtual.
Paciência	Envolve a capacidade de saber esperar, continuar e não desistir, apesar da demora que possa estar associada à consecução do seu objetivo.
Inclusividade	Trata-se da capacidade de incluir todos os alunos e tratá-los a todos de forma justa e igualitária num ambiente virtual, minimizando as suas diferenças.
Resolução de problemas	Capacidade em encontrar uma solução para uma questão, uma situação difícil ou complexa. Inclui a resolução de problemas com recurso a ferramentas digitais disponíveis nos ambientes digitais.
Trabalho de equipa	Capacidade de contribuir para um resultado pedagógico coletivo, comum e partilhado, demonstrando o equilíbrio entre as diferentes características e interesses do grupo educativo.
Gestão do stress	Trata-se da capacidade que permite lidar com o stress, que resulta da resposta do professor perante as adversidades advindas de certos estímulos ambientais (o clima da sala de aula, a relação com os familiares dos alunos, as relações com os colegas, etc.).

Figure 7 – the 20 soft skills discussed

After the second part has been completed, it was time to choose the twelve more important soft skills for blended learning, through the point of view of the ten participants.

For this exercise and, in order to get each one's votes, the tree bellow (figure 8), with no flowers on it, was presented to the participants, as well as the flower corresponding to each participant.



The moderator Marta Peixoto explained that the twenty soft skills elected previously were distributed on the tree, and each participant, should vote at the twelve most important soft skills, putting his/her flower on the respective soft skills. Consequently, the participants couldn't only vote all at the same time, at the interactive board, but also follow other participants votes. Finally, the tree had all the participants's votes, as it's shared belllow.



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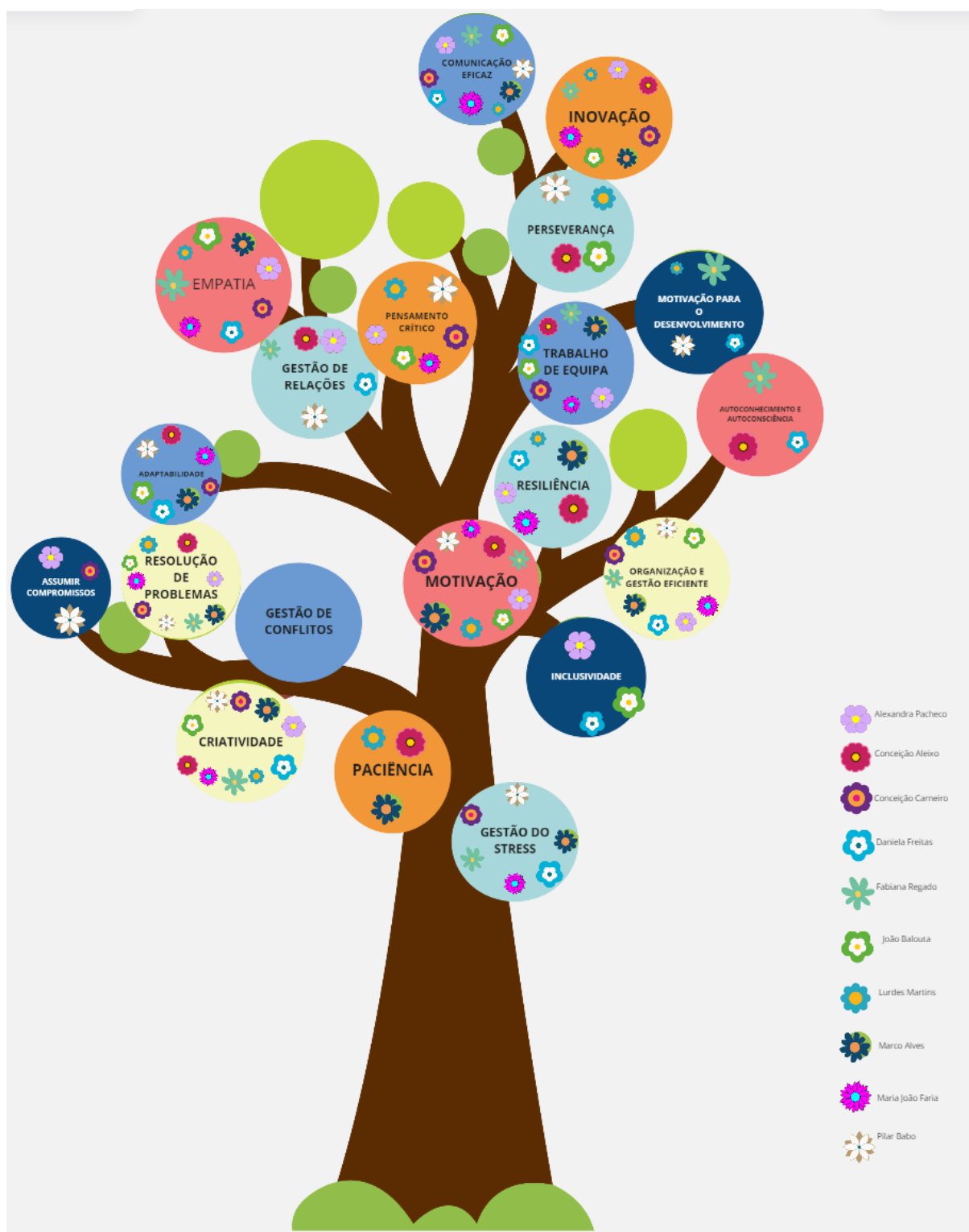


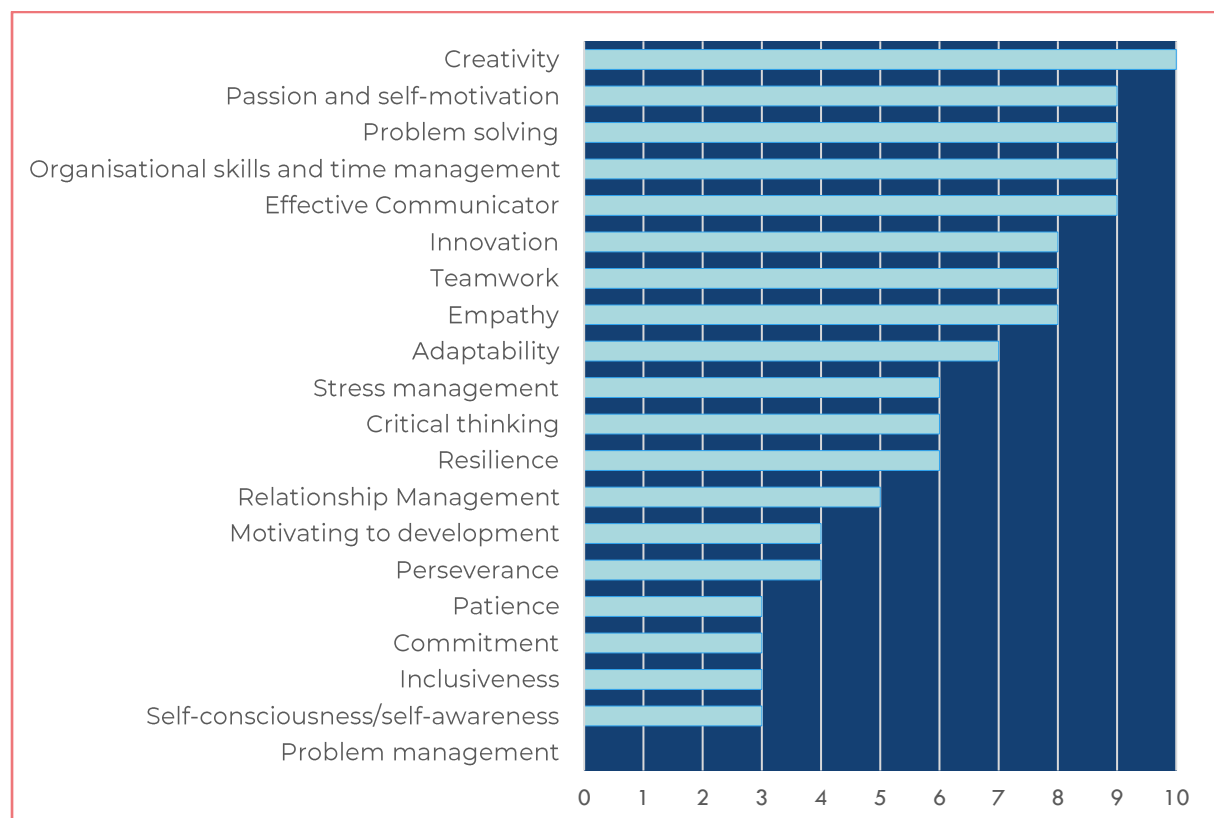
Figure 8 – voting process

After the analysis of the votes, it was undeniable that Creativity was the most voted soft skill, since all the ten participants voted on it as, on the other hand, none of the participants has voted on Problem management.

With nine votes each, the participants chosen Passion and Self-motivation, Problem solving, Organizational skills and Time Management and Effective Communication as some of the most important soft skills, while Self-consciousness/self-awareness, Inclusiveness, Commitment and Patience had only three votes each.

Continuing the analysis, one can observe that Innovation, Teamwork and Empathy had eight votes each and Adaptability had seven votes, while Perseverance and Motivating to development had four votes each.

Finally, six participants have voted on Stress Management, Critical thinking and Resilience, and five elected Relationship Management, as other of the most important soft skills for blended learning.



Graphic 1 – voted soft skills

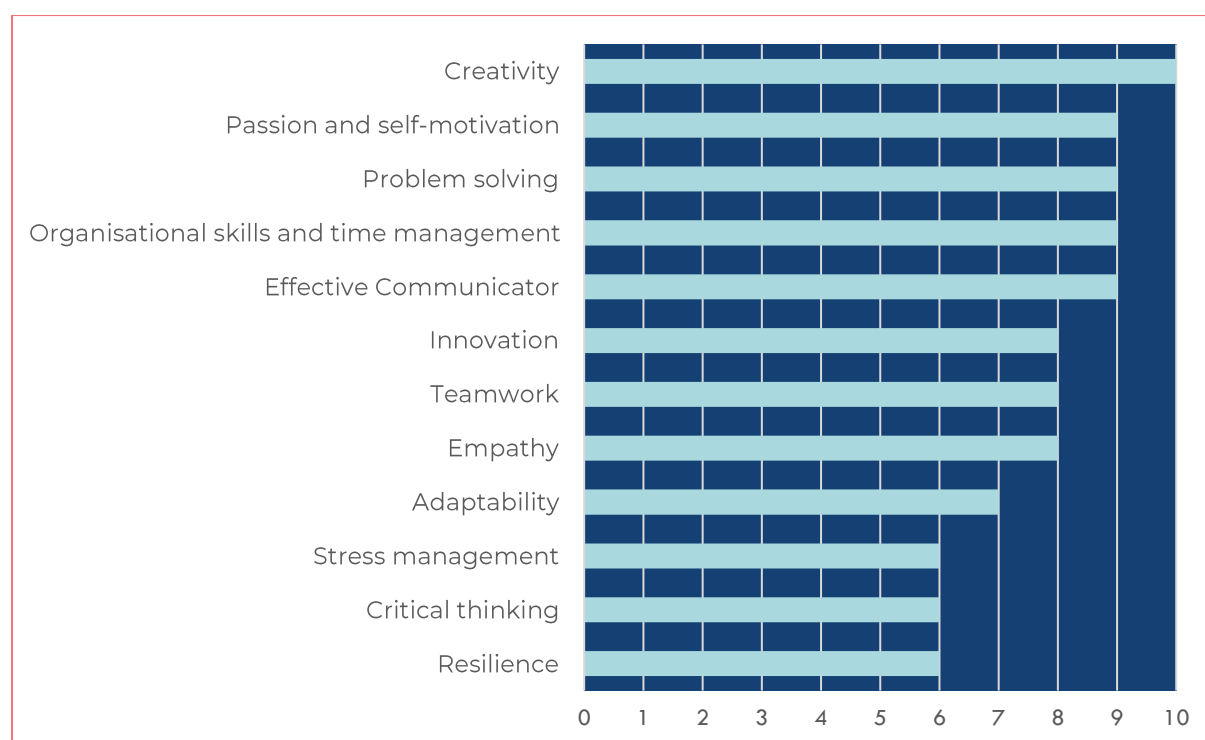
## 4. Conclusion

The focus group, which took place on the seventh of February of 2022, was extremely enriching, for the opportunity of sharing different points of view and opinions, exchanging ideas and getting a better understanding about the needed soft skills for blended learning, which is a very present reality these days.

All the participants were very helpful and demonstrated a truly concern about the needed soft skills for support that is given to the students, in order to get a better understanding and knowledge about it, so that support becomes more effective and contributes to the students' success.

The moderators Marta Peixoto e Antónia Marinho were also always available and made a true work of dialogue enhancers, making very interesting questions, promoting different discussions on the theme and guiding the participants till the meeting got its purpose.

This participants of the Focus Group had chosen the twelve most important soft skills for blended learning, the following (Graphic 2): Creativity (10 votes), Passion and self-motivation (9 votes), Problem solving (9 votes), Organizational skills and time management (9 votes), Effective communicator (9 votes), Innovation (8 votes), Teamwork (8 votes), Empathy (8 votes), Adaptability (7 votes), Stress management (6 votes), Critical thinking (6 votes) and Resilience (6 votes).



Graphic 2 – most voted soft skills

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the results of the Focus Group, it should be considered that the basis for the teaching/learning process stands, for no doubt, in the relationship that is developed between teacher and student, and therefore the soft skills on the teachers are very important. On the other hand, the support given to each student, depends on the creativity and self-motivation of the teacher, put in his/her work, daily. Thus, if we want to have successful students, we must increase the teachers' skills – hard and soft – to become even more successful teachers, with the best teaching techniques.

Furthermore, it is vital to unshorten the distance between students, teachers and families and use all the resources available to get closer to each other, and transform “distance”, which is only a word, to an opportunity of the teaching/learning relationship.

The Focus Group has proved that, despite the importance of technologies, it is on the human potential that should be highlighted on an intervention, that is the most effective approach to positively intervene in the process of learning and teaching, and that way guarantee that no one is left behind.