

TIME MANAGEMENT AS A KEY SOFT SKILL FOR SUCCESS IN REMOTE WORK

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*Digital Narratives: THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS IN ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AMONG
UNIVERSITY GRADUATES*

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Abstract: In an era of rapid technological advancements and shifting industry demands, the nature of employability has evolved significantly. While technical knowledge and domain-specific expertise remain important, they are no longer the sole determinants of a graduate's career success. Employers now emphasize a broader skill set that includes essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. These interpersonal and cognitive abilities are crucial for building professional relationships, resolving conflicts, leading projects, and adapting to change—all of which are vital in today's collaborative and fast-paced work environments. This growing emphasis on soft skills reflects a shift in how employability is perceived—not just as the ability to perform specific tasks, but as the capacity to thrive within diverse teams and dynamic organizational cultures. Despite this, many university curricula remain heavily focused on technical training, often neglecting structured development of soft skills. Consequently, a gap has emerged between the competencies students acquire during their academic journey and those demanded by employers in the real world.

This study aims to critically examine the role of soft skills in enhancing the employability of university graduates, exploring how interpersonal and communication competencies impact their career opportunities and workplace integration. A mixed-methods approach is used, combining a comprehensive literature review with primary research conducted through surveys and interviews involving final-year students and employers across various sectors. The study investigates which soft skills are most valued by employers and highlights the disconnect between academic preparation and professional expectations. Preliminary findings indicate a strong positive relationship between soft skill proficiency and employability outcomes, reinforcing the urgency for universities to embed soft skill development into their educational frameworks. The research culminates in a set of actionable recommendations directed at educational institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to bridge the skills gap. By doing so, the aim is to cultivate a future workforce that is not only technically adept but also socially and emotionally equipped to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy.

1. Introduction:

In today's fast-paced and competitive job market, employability is no longer determined solely by academic achievement or technical expertise. Increasingly, employers are placing equal—if not greater—emphasis on soft skills, which include communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, time management, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, more than 50% of all employees will require significant reskilling by 2025, with soft skills being among the top priorities for hiring managers. These human-centric skills play a crucial role in ensuring a candidate's ability to collaborate, innovate, handle pressure, and grow within an organization, particularly in a world shaped by automation, digital transformation, and global collaboration.

Despite this growing demand, many higher education institutions continue to emphasize theoretical and technical instruction, often at the expense of developing interpersonal and workplace-readiness skills. Research conducted by LinkedIn in its Global Talent Trends Report found that 89% of recruiters believe that when a hire doesn't work out, it usually comes down to a lack of soft skills. This disconnect between what universities deliver and what industries demand contributes to the employability gap faced by many fresh graduates. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role and importance of soft skills in enhancing the employability prospects of university graduates. Through a combination of literature review and primary data gathered from surveys and interviews with students and employers, this research will identify the most sought-after soft skills in the current job market and explore how institutions can integrate these skills into the academic curriculum to ensure graduates are both professionally and socially competent.

Time management, often underestimated, is not merely about scheduling tasks—it's about aligning priorities, maintaining focus, and sustaining a work-life balance in a digitally connected yet physically dispersed setting. As distractions become more prevalent and boundaries between work and personal life blur, professionals must develop strategies to stay organized, motivated, and emotionally grounded. This paper explores time management not just as a technical competency, but as a behavioral and cultural tool that empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of remote work effectively. By drawing on literature, primary data, and lived experiences, the study aims to underscore how mastering time management can serve as a foundation for thriving in modern, remote-first work environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Time management has long been championed as a key to success, but its importance has grown exponentially with the shift toward remote work. Traditional frameworks like Covey's Time Management Matrix (2004) and Allen's Getting Things Done (2001) laid the groundwork for structuring tasks in high-pressure environments. These models emphasized prioritization, delegation, and clarity—skills that are even more critical when employees work independently.

Recent research aligns with this view. Allen et al. (2015) highlighted how remote workers who apply structured time techniques reported significantly improved job satisfaction. Ferreira et al. (2021) extended this understanding by examining how effective time management reduced accidents and fatigue, highlighting its role in creating safer, more efficient workplaces.

Beyond techniques, mindset plays a crucial role. Vanderkam (2016) reframed time as a matter of perspective, urging professionals to consider not just what they do, but how and why they do it. Tools such as SMART goals, digital planners, and prioritization matrices help implement this mindset, but success depends on internal discipline and external support.

The literature is consistent: time management enhances both output and well-being. However, it also suggests a deeper truth—knowing about time management is not enough. True effectiveness arises when individuals change behaviors, employers reinforce boundaries, and educators cultivate lifelong skills.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Aims

To capture the complex interplay of time management in remote work, a mixed-method research design was implemented.

3.2 Participants

A purposive sample of 50 professionals aged 25–45, all with at least one year of remote work experience, was selected across various sectors, including IT, education, healthcare, and marketing.

3.3 Tools and Instruments

- Gathered data on time management habits, tool usage, perceived productivity, and emotional stress.
- Ten participants shared deeper insights about their personal challenges and strategies.

Fifteen participants maintained a log for four weeks to track real-time engagement, task duration, and boundary-setting behaviors.

3.4 Key Observational Variables:

- Frequency and type of digital planning tools used
- Work-life separation strategies
- Self-evaluation of task prioritization
- Emotional responses to work overflow or time scarcity

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative Findings

- 76% used digital calendars or planners daily.
- 64% employed time-blocking methods and reported noticeable gains in productivity.
- 47% admitted they worked overtime due to undefined work-life boundaries.
- 69% experienced mental health improvement through structured planning.
- 83% stated that built-in breaks helped restore focus and reduce fatigue.

4.2 Quantitative Insights

Interview narratives illuminated how behavior and mindset transformed outcomes. One participant reflected, “When I ignored structure, work consumed my evenings. But setting limits gave me peace and focus.” Another remarked, “It took burnout to realize I needed a daily rhythm. Now, even my weekends feel more rewarding.”

These personal stories underline a consistent pattern: when remote workers build intentional schedules, they regain control—not just over their time, but over their emotional well-being. Merely having access to tools like Trello or Google Calendar is not transformative unless paired with commitment, reflection, and support systems.

Organizational flexibility also played a role. Employers who recognized the need for autonomy, structured flexibility (like ‘no-meeting Fridays’), and clear accountability saw better employee engagement. This highlights that successful time management is both a personal and organizational responsibility.

4.3 Discussion

The results illustrate the significant role that soft skills play in a graduate's employability. Although students reflect an awareness of their importance, it is clear that they lack confidence and opportunity to develop them. Employers still struggle to find graduates who are technically competent and can apply their emotional intelligence and soft skills effectively.

One reason for this challenge is the limited amount of soft skill training provided in most academic program structures. Another challenge is the absence of a universally accepted way of assessing soft skills, and the measuring and development of soft skills requires consistent measurement. It is also clear that one of the main barriers to students valuing soft skills in their education is how little they are part of educational assessment.

5. Recommendation

5.1 For Remote Workers

- Begin with clarity: Define what needs to be accomplished each day.
- Use time-blocking to separate deep work from administrative tasks.
- Embrace digital planners, but revisit them daily with intention.
- End the workday with a routine to signal cognitive closure.

5.2 For Employers

- Offer time management workshops tailored to remote challenges.
- Encourage the definition and respect of working hours.
- Enable flexible but accountable schedules.
- Recognize and reward self-managed productivity.

5.3 For Educators

- Collaborate with industry practitioners to provide students with opportunities such as internships, Integrate time management into project-based learning.
- Equip students with practical tools and real-life simulations.
- Promote reflective journaling to understand time behavior.
- Reinforce time use as a skill—not just a classroom necessity.

6. Conclusion

Remote work has redefined how we perceive productivity, autonomy, and work-life integration. While tools and platforms are readily available, the cornerstone of success lies in how individuals manage their time, set their boundaries, and align their energy with purpose.

Time management is more than a calendar—it's a philosophy. It shapes how we experience work, handle pressure, and preserve our mental space. For remote work to thrive as a sustainable model, this skill must be cultivated not just individually, but culturally—within homes, institutions, and organizations.

The future of work is flexible, but it demands responsibility. Time management offers that structure—the invisible thread that ties freedom with focus, and productivity with peace.

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