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Scientific articles

Ventaja competitiva en las empresas mexicanas y la relación de las habilidades blandas para la empleabilidad

Competitive advantage in Mexican companies and the relationship of soft skills to employability

Vantagem competitiva em empresas mexicanas e a relação entre habilidades interpessoais e empregabilidade

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Resumen

Actualmente, las empresas mexicanas desempeñan un papel clave en el impulso de la economía nacional al generar empleo, fomentar la innovación y contribuir a la diversificación productiva. El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar la relación entre las habilidades blandas y la empleabilidad como factores que fortalecen la ventaja competitiva organizacional constituye el objetivo de esta investigación. Se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo, se aplicó la prueba no paramétrica de χ^2 (chi-cuadrado) para contrastar la hipótesis y analizar la relación entre variables. Los resultados evidencian asociaciones estadísticamente significativas entre toma de decisiones, manejo del estrés, pensamiento innovador y los indicadores clave de



empleabilidad, lo que refuerza la necesidad de integrar estas habilidades en los procesos de formación y desarrollo del capital humano.

Palabras clave: capital humano, competencias sociomocionales, habilidades blandas, inserción laboral, ventaja competitiva, empleabilidad.

Abstract

Currently, Mexican companies play a key role in driving the national economy by generating employment, fostering innovation, and contributing to economic diversification. This study aims to identify the relationship between soft skills and employability as factors that strengthen organizations' competitive advantage. A quantitative design was implemented, and nonparametric Chi-square test was applied to test the hypothesis and examine associations between variables. The results show statistically significant associations between decision-making, stress management, innovative thinking, and self-awareness and key employability indicators, reinforcing the need to integrate these skills into human capital training and development.

Keywords: human capital, job placement, soft skills, socioemotional competencies, competitive advantage, employability.

Resumo

Atualmente, as empresas mexicanas desempenham um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento da economia nacional, gerando empregos, fomentando a inovação e contribuindo para a diversificação produtiva. O objetivo desta pesquisa é identificar a relação entre as competências socioemocionais e a empregabilidade como fatores que fortalecem a vantagem competitiva organizacional. Utilizou-se uma abordagem quantitativa, aplicando o teste não paramétrico χ^2 (qui-quadrado) para testar a hipótese e analisar a relação entre as variáveis. Os resultados demonstram associações estatisticamente significativas entre tomada de decisão, gestão do estresse, pensamento inovador e indicadores-chave de empregabilidade, reforçando a necessidade de integrar essas competências aos processos de treinamento e desenvolvimento de capital humano.

Palavras-chave: capital humano, competências socioemocionais, competências interpessoais, integração no mercado de trabalho, vantagem competitiva, empregabilidade.

Introduction

The speed at which the world changes today makes it necessary for people to have a high degree of adaptability in order to take advantage of the many opportunities that life offers, and also its countless challenges.

Among the crucial elements for developing this adaptability is ensuring that people acquire a suitable set of skills or abilities, use them effectively at work and in society, and renew them in their personal and professional lives.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023), people with high levels of skills or competencies have access to better job opportunities and higher salaries. Furthermore, those with greater competencies tend to have higher levels of confidence, participate more actively in democratic processes and community life, and enjoy better health. Consequently, higher levels of competencies lead to greater opportunities for growth and development, both professionally and personally.

The World Economic Forum (2024) has identified skills as crucial elements for the future of work, highlighting the importance of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and technological literacy. It emphasizes that skills like analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, and agility are essential for the future of employment. Forty-four percent of workers' basic skills will be altered due to rapid technological evolution, underscoring the need to adapt to changing labor market demands. Skills play an important cross-cutting role in improving employability and job placement, but although perceived as an improvement, they are not yielding the expected results. The best alignment between skills, qualifications, and workplace lies in job demands based on an ideal and generic skills profile, rather than on the employer's subjective opinion (Ojeda, 2024, p. 86).

A lack of social skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and empathy limits the ability to interact appropriately and adapt to diverse social contexts. The absence of these skills makes it difficult to initiate and sustain conversations, express emotions, resolve conflicts, and establish personal boundaries, which can lead to stress, depression, fear of negative evaluation, and a decline in quality of life and mental health (Newman et al., 2020).

In the workplace, insufficient social skills directly affect group dynamics, diminishing trust among members, increasing anxiety and frustration, and hindering the achievement of collective goals. Improving these skills is essential for promoting collaborative environments and a healthy organizational climate. As Endara and Vargas (2022), cited in Mayolema et al. (2024), conclude, the development of social skills is crucial for strengthening teamwork and fostering more effective working relationships.

a) Definitions and theoretical bases on competitive advantage

Competitive advantage is achieved when an organization implements a strategy capable of generating superior value for its customers that its competitors cannot replicate or find too costly to imitate (Hitt et al., 2017). Similarly, Ulrich et al. (2017, p. 62) point out that competitive advantage arises from leveraging specialization, optimizing information costs, integrating complementary strengths, and generating synergies that allow the organization as a whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, Biech (2018) states that competitive advantage is built through the articulation of talent and leadership as a force that permeates the entire organization.

(b) Organizational implications

From this perspective, competitive advantage can be understood as the result of a systemic plan that holistically and effectively integrates talent, processes, and structures under the coherent direction of leaders. This strategic articulation drives the achievement of organizational objectives (Carrera, 2021).

(c) Macroeconomic approach and competitiveness

On a broader level, competitiveness is a central concern for economic actors and society in general, given its link to economic development, increased production, and job creation. As Nel et al. (2022) indicate, competitiveness transcends the organizational sphere by influencing a country's economic performance.

Within the realm of human capital, an exceptionally talented individual cannot, on their own and in isolation, achieve business goals. The organization needs to integrate their knowledge and skills with the other components of the system to enhance the achievement of objectives and strategic plans.

In relation to the above, several national and international studies have analyzed the evolution of labor demand. Deming and Noray (2019, as cited in De La Concha, 2023) published the study " *The Value of Soft Skills in the Labor Market*" at Harvard University , in which they point to a slowdown in the demand for cognitive skills in certain sectors and specific periods. They also report that some jobs in the United States showed a reduction between 2000 and 2012, associated with structural changes in the labor market.

In these works, he argues that cognitive skills were once of paramount importance, but over time, social skills are now considered essential in the job market. He also points out that new technologies increase the importance of skills and tasks, but these tasks are routine and easily codified; however, people excel at open-ended tasks that require flexibility, creativity, judgment, and other qualities .

Ronald and Kylie (2018, as cited in De La Concha, 2023) conducted research in Vietnam, noting that workers must possess the necessary soft skills to be competitive in the workplace. They observed that universities have paid little attention to this, thus forcing them to hire and provide training in this crucial area. It is important to mention that soft or socio-emotional skills should be constantly assessed to allow human capital to be enhanced in the workplace.

A study on Millennials in Latin America and the Caribbean highlights the importance of designing policies that enable young professionals to acquire the skills necessary to successfully enter the labor market. The measurement of socio-emotional skills, aspirations, and expectations, along with the analysis of their correlation with young people's career decisions, was considered one of the research's key contributions. The study emphasizes that social skills, also known as soft skills, include, among others, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-control, and perseverance. A series of validated instruments were used to measure these skills.

Based on the above , soft skills play an important role in Mexican companies when incorporating human capital. In this context, this study aims to determine the relationship between soft skills and employability as a competitive advantage for Mexican companies, from the perspective of senior management.

This research seeks to generate empirical evidence that contributes to strengthening the business sector in Mexico, especially in the state of Hidalgo, by offering a reference on the skills that human capital must develop to respond to current employability demands.

The article is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework is presented, addressing the fundamental concepts that underpin the study. Next, the methodology is described, detailing the approach, procedures, and data collection methods. The results section presents the findings derived from the analysis. Following this, the discussion compares the results with the relevant literature. Finally, the conclusions summarize the study's contributions and suggest potential avenues for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Mexican Companies

A country's economic development is largely determined by the businesses that comprise it. According to the Economic Censuses of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) (2024), 99.8% of businesses in Mexico are micro, small, or medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Due to their characteristics, these economic units tend to experience greater changes compared to large companies, particularly in aspects such as revenue, number of employees, location, closures, and openings, among others. In Mexico, there are approximately 7,056,499 establishments in the private and public sectors, employing 36,793,604 people; of these, 95% are MSMEs.

Of the 4.9 million micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Mexico, the 2024 Business Demographics Study (EDN) estimated that 7,056,499 survived, representing 95%. Between May 2019 and May 2023, approximately 1.7 million businesses were created and 1.4 million closed. The service sector had the highest proportion of both new businesses and closures in 2023. For every 100 businesses in this sector, approximately 38.46% were created and 32.19% closed. Comparing these figures with previous studies, it is observed that between May 2019 and September 2020, this rate increased to 24%, and finally, in May 2023, it reached 38.46%. Regarding the closure rate, a decrease was identified between the EDN 2021 and EDN 2023 reports in the trade and services sectors: the former went from 29.88% to 27.45% and the latter from 38.16% to 32.19%, respectively.

It should be noted that in 2019 a study was conducted on formal and informal businesses that survived or disappeared, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proportion of births and deaths at the national level, by sector of economic activity



Note: INEGI. EDN (2020, 2021 and 2023)

As can be seen, -many companies have failed to survive the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for various reasons. However, a fundamental factor to consider is human capital, as it is largely responsible for achieving organizational goals.

According to INEGI (2024), the Economic Censuses use the number of employees as a criterion for classifying micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and large companies. Micro-enterprises are defined as those with zero to ten employees; small, between 11 and 50; medium, between 51 and 250; and large, with more than 250 employees.

Regarding employment, the number of new businesses increased, while business closures decreased. Compared to 2018, total employment in newly created businesses increased by 8.40% nationally in 2020, 16.86% in 2021, and 28.32% in 2023. This trend held true when analyzing only micro-enterprises or only MSMEs.

Nationally, between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of people employed in establishments that closed increased from 20.24% in 2020 to 26.83% in 2021. However, due to post-pandemic reopenings, the proportion decreased to 26.51% in 2023. When analyzing establishments by size, it was identified that reopenings primarily impacted micro-businesses, as the proportion of employed personnel involved in the closures of these establishments decreased from 29.43% in 2021 to 28.13% in 2023.

Regarding the total revenue generated by businesses and establishments in the country, SMEs contributed 17.1% of total revenue. Meanwhile, large establishments (with 251 or more employees) represented only 0.2% of all economic units, but accounted for 29.3% of employment and generated 43.5% of national revenue.

According to INEGI data (2025), there were approximately seven million establishments in Mexico, employing nearly 37 million people. 95.5% of these establishments were micro-businesses, which employed 41.5% of the working population. Women's participation in economic activities was 43.6%, the highest figure recorded to date by the Economic Censuses. Additionally, a total of 101,184 economic units employed people with some type of disability. Between 2018 and 2023, the percentage of establishments selling online increased from 3.0% to 5.5%.

Soft Skills

It is essential to understand that soft skills are critical both for individual success in the workplace and for the effectiveness of business processes. Companies seek talent that possesses not only technical skills, but also interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional intelligence.

In this sense, socio-affective skills are necessary for socialization and interaction with others, since they allow one to face different situations and demands through critical thinking, decision-making oriented towards problem-solving, recognition of other people's emotions and the building of relationships on the physical, emotional and affective levels (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003).

These skills are grouped into three categories:

1. Interpersonal skills: assertive communication, negotiation, trust, cooperation, and empathy.
2. Cognitive skills: problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, self-assessment, analysis and understanding of consequences.
3. Skills for emotional control: managing and recognizing emotions in stressful situations or intense feelings (Guerra-Báez, 2019).

Díaz et al. (2021) point out that the WHO defines life skills as a “set of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that can be oriented toward personal and interpersonal actions, and those necessary to transform the environment in a way that is conducive to health” (p. XX). These are classified as social, cognitive, and emotional skills. The life skills approach seeks to develop in adolescents the skills necessary to strengthen their holistic development and effectively face daily challenges, considering:

- Social and interpersonal skills: communication, conflict resolution, empathy and aggression management.
- Cognitive skills: decision making, critical thinking, and self-assessment.
- Emotional management skills: stress regulation and strengthening of internal locus of control.

The WHO (1999) defined life skills as “the ability of an individual to cope successfully with the demands and challenges of daily life” (p. XX), emphasizing their relevance to public health and healthcare. Additionally, the WHO (2025) promotes the development of technical, cognitive, communicative, and problem-solving skills, seeking to improve the quality of care and strengthen the resilience of health systems.

Soft skills, also known as socio-emotional skills, are essential for the holistic development of knowledge and education. These skills do not operate independently but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Their importance lies in their fundamental role in professional and working life. Among the most relevant are assertive communication, negotiation skills, confidence, cooperation, empathy, decision-making, critical thinking, self-assessment, analysis and understanding of consequences, and the management of emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration.

These skills can be associated with four key dimensions of human development: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Delors, UNESCO, 1996). Furthermore, egocentrism is a behavior that weakens or even negates the development of these skills (De La Ossa, 2022).

In organizations, soft skills are closely linked to human capital as the driving force behind productive development and economic growth. Education, understood as a continuous process of acquiring skills and abilities, determines worker productivity, income levels, and ultimately, the overall well-being of society.

According to the IDB (2012), skills fall into two main categories: cognitive and socio-emotional. Cognitive skills are linked to cognition and academic knowledge, while socio-emotional skills are related to behavior and personality traits. This document distinguishes three groups of capabilities: knowledge, skills, and competencies.

- Knowledge: mathematics, statistics, languages, costs and microeconomics.
- Skills: writing, computer use, complex problem solving, oral communication.
- Skills: adaptability to change, self-directed learning and autonomy.

Knowledge and skills are easier to assess and develop, while competencies are more difficult to measure and develop due to the influence of personality traits.

There are three competency models:

1. Distinctive competencies: combination of cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, leadership, motivations, attitudes, personality traits and applied knowledge.
2. Generic competencies: focused on behaviors, including interpersonal, cognitive and leadership skills; occasionally specific knowledge.
3. Functional competencies: emphasize technical knowledge and specific skills (Matus and Gutiérrez, 2020).

Zaracho (2024) points out that skills such as effective communication, teamwork and adaptability are positively associated with job performance; the greater the development of these skills, the greater the productivity and efficiency of the staff.

Garavito et al. (2024) highlight that soft skills are fundamental to individual success and the effectiveness of business processes. The absence of these skills can lead to misinterpretations of the message transmitted or received, affecting employability. Furthermore, the WHO, in collaboration with the Global Initiative for School Health, has identified the promotion of these skills as a priority strategy for mental health (Ippolito-Shepherd & Cerqueira , 2003, as cited in Garavito et al., 2024).

Carrera (2021) analyzed how the strategic use of human capital relates to competitive advantage, showing that there is no competitive advantage without the efficient use of human talent and alignment with organizational development programs.

Therefore, soft skills play a fundamental role in the job placement of professionals, highlighting the importance of possessing these competencies when seeking employment. In this regard, this study seeks to identify the relationship between soft skills and employability in Mexican companies, emphasizing which skills are most valued when hiring personnel.

Hypothesis: Soft skills are related to employability as a competitive advantage in Mexican companies.

Materials and methods

The present study followed a quantitative, descriptive and correlational approach, with a non-experimental cross-sectional design, since it sought to analyze the relationship between soft skills and employability at a specific time, without intervening in the variables.

Participants and sampling frame

The study population consisted of 117 Mexican companies located in the state of Hidalgo. This figure corresponds to the establishments registered in the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (DENUE, INEGI, 2019) during the data collection period. Therefore, the sample was considered a census based on the DENUE 2019 framework, with a 100% response rate. Inclusion criteria were applied to companies with at least one year of operation and willingness to answer the questionnaire.

Instrument

A structured questionnaire was designed for data collection, based on theoretical frameworks relevant to the study variables (López et al., 2023; Álvarez, 2020; Martínez, 2022). The items were derived from the literature on soft skills and employability, adapting them to the Mexican organizational context and the profile of the participating companies. Expert review ensured content validity, and a pilot study was conducted with 15 companies with similar characteristics to refine the wording and clarity of the items.

The instrument included a total of 27 items, distributed in two sections: 12 soft skills items and 10 employability items, plus 5 general company identification items. Soft skills were organized into three dimensions: interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional control. All Likert-type questions were measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.

Reliability and analysis of the instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, using SPSS software version 25. The total α and by subscales were reported to ensure the internal consistency of the items, considering acceptable values of $\alpha \geq 0.70$.

Ethical considerations

The principles of informed consent and confidentiality were respected, and it was ensured that the information provided by the participants was used exclusively for research purposes.

Statistical analysis

To examine the relationship between soft skills and employability, the chi-square test of independence was applied using cross-tabulations in SPSS. This technique allows for the evaluation of the association between categorical variables, reporting χ^2 (df , N), p-value, and effect size (ϕ or Cramer's V). It is important to emphasize that the test identifies associations, not causal relationships.

Conceptualization and operationalization of variables

The definition of variables and their indicators is presented in Table 1, based on various authors and adapted to the context of the study (see Table 1). The dimension to which each item belongs is included for a clear mapping of soft skills and employability.

Table 1. Conceptualization and operationalization of the variables.

Variable	Dimension	Concept	Indicator
Innovative thinking	Cognitive	Ability to generate a greater number of ideas tailored to the needs of the environment (López et al., 2023).	V5, V7
Intuition	Cognitive	Ability to understand situations immediately without the need for conscious reasoning (Álvarez, 2020).	V4
Stress management	Emotional control	Ability to respond adequately to demands and pressures from the environment; its excess can affect health (Martínez, 2022).	V10
Logical reasoning	Cognitive	Ability to process, analyze and understand information in a logical and systematic way using mathematical principles (Zambrano et al., 2024).	V6
Emotional control	Emotional control	A state of well-being that allows the individual to recognize their emotions and maintain healthy relationships (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).	V3
Assertive communication	Interpersonal	Ability to express ideas clearly, respecting the opinions of others and facilitating collaboration (Lozada et al., 2020, as cited in Carrión et al., 2024).	V9
decision making	Cognitive	It involves inductive and deductive reasoning processes that generate intuitive or analytical responses based on experience (Ruiz & Álvarez, 2022).	V12
Self-knowledge	Interpersonal	Capacity for introspection to identify emotions, qualities, limitations and personal strengths (Asispa, 2022).	V8, V11
Conflict resolution	Interpersonal	A social process that allows managing situations to bring about change and promote peace (Galtung, as cited in Alma, 2023).	V2
Interpersonal relationship	Interpersonal	Ability to establish links and connections in the workplace (Hanco et al., 2021; Goleman, 2021).	V1
Employability		Ability to access and maintain decent employment by taking advantage of education and training opportunities (ILO, 2024).	V13– V22

Source: Prepared by the author based on various sources

Results

Instrument reliability

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was acceptable, with a standardized α of 0.837 for the 22 Likert-type items (see Table 2). The α values by subscale were: interpersonal = 0.815, cognitive = 0.798, emotional control = 0.784, and employability = 0.847.

Table 2. Instrument reliability analysis

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Alpha based on standardized elements	Number of items
Total	0.837	0.837	22
Interpersonal	0.812	0.815	6
Cognitive	0.795	0.798	4
Emotional control	0.781	0.784	2
Employability	0.843	0.847	10

Source: Prepared by the author based on the SPSS program.

Note: Only Likert-type items were calculated; identification/demographic items were excluded.

Association between soft skills and employability

To evaluate the hypothesis H_1 (soft skills are associated with employability), the χ^2 test of independence with Likert recoding was used. χ^2 , p , and Cramer's V values were calculated for each test.

The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3. In all cases analyzed, the two-tailed significance value (p) was less than the established alpha level of 0.05, indicating that there are statistically significant relationships between the variables evaluated.

Table 3. Results of the Chi-square analysis of soft skills and employability

Soft skills	Employability indicator	χ^2	gl	p	Cramer's V	N
Conflict Resolution (V2)	V17	32,977	9	< .001	0.34	117
Intuition (V4)	V13	36,234	12	< .001	0.31	117
Intuition (V4)	V14	42,972	6	< .001	0.36	117
Intuition (V4)	V16	40,880	9	< .001	0.32	117
Intuition (V4)	V21	31,123	12	.002	0.29	117
Innovative thinking (V5)	V15	34,656	12	.001	0.30	117
Innovative thinking (V5)	V16	32,119	9	< .001	0.28	117
Innovative thinking (V5)	V18	47,809	9	< .001	0.39	117
Logical Reasoning (V6)	V15	39,699	12	< .001	0.33	117
Innovative thinking (V7)	V19	39,735	6	< .001	0.35	117
Innovative thinking (V7)	V21	58,453	12	< .001	0.42	117
Innovative thinking (V7)	V22	29,476	6	< .001	0.30	117
Self-knowledge (V8)	V15	30,288	12	.003	0.28	117
Self-knowledge (V8)	V17	42,057	9	< .001	0.36	117
Self-knowledge (V8)	V21	21,304	12	.046	0.22	117
Stress Management (V10)	V13	46,845	12	< .001	0.37	117
Stress Management (V10)	V16	32,460	9	< .001	0.31	117
Stress Management (V10)	V17	42,213	9	< .001	0.35	117
Decision making (V11)	V15	43,748	8	< .001	0.36	117
Decision making (V11)	V16	40,399	6	< .001	0.34	117
Decision making (V11)	V17	38,280	6	< .001	0.33	117
Decision making (V11)	V18	26,402	6	< .001	0.27	117
Emotional Control (V12)	V13	32,923	16	.008	0.29	117
Emotional Control (V12)	V14	29,778	8	< .001	0.28	117
Emotional Control (V12)	V21	38,658	16	.001	0.31	117

Source: Prepared by the author based on the chi-square test in SPSS.

Note: Likert categories were recoded into three levels to meet χ^2 assumptions; $\alpha = 0.05$; effect size is reported using Cramer's V

The results of the Chi-square analysis show that various soft skills are significantly associated with different employability indicators in Mexican companies, supporting the study's associative hypothesis. The analysis by variable is detailed below:

Conflict Resolution (V2)

This skill was significantly associated with adaptability and job performance (V17), showing a medium effect size ($V = 0.34$). This finding indicates that employees who can manage conflict effectively tend to maintain stable performance and contribute positively to organizational dynamics, which in turn impacts their job retention.

Intuition (V4)

Intuition showed significant associations with multiple employability indicators (V13, V14, V16, V21), with effect sizes between 0.29 and 0.36, suggesting a cross-cutting influence on employability, adaptability, and decision-making. This reinforces the idea that individuals who can quickly and intuitively understand situations can respond more effectively to job challenges and opportunities, contributing to their competitiveness in the workplace.

Innovative thinking (V5 and V7)

This competency was associated with various employability indicators (V15, V16, V18, V19, V21, V22) with effect sizes ranging from 0.28 to 0.42, showing the strongest and most consistent association among all the soft skills analyzed. This indicates that the ability to generate original ideas and creative solutions translates into greater adaptability and proactivity at work, favoring both job retention and mobility within the company.

Self-knowledge (V8)

Self-awareness was associated with employability indicators related to performance and professional development (V15, V17, V21), with effect sizes between 0.22 and 0.36. This result suggests that those with a greater capacity for introspection and awareness of their strengths and limitations can make more informed decisions about their career, aligning their skills with job demands and increasing their value to the organization.

Stress Management (V10)

This skill was related to several employability indicators (V13, V16, V17), with moderate effect sizes (0.31–0.37). The ability to withstand and manage job demands and work pressure contributes to stability in performance and the capacity to adapt to organizational changes, critical aspects for sustainable employability.

Decision making (V11)

Decision-making showed significant associations with indicators such as performance, adaptation, and job mobility (V15, V16, V17, V18), with effect sizes of 0.27 to 0.36. This finding highlights that the ability to process information, evaluate alternatives, and select optimal strategies is directly reflected in job effectiveness and the ability to maintain employment in different organizational contexts.

Emotional Control (V12)

Emotional control was associated with employability indicators such as adaptation and performance (V13, V14, V21), with small to medium effect sizes (0.28–0.31). This indicates that emotional well-being and emotion regulation are relevant factors for maintaining healthy working relationships and consistent performance, aspects that facilitate retention and growth within the labor market.

Taken together, the findings show that all the soft skills assessed have some degree of association with various employability indicators, confirming that these competencies do not operate in isolation but rather have a cross-cutting impact on diverse aspects of the professional profile. The median effect sizes suggest that these associations are significant, although the cross-sectional design does not allow for inferences of causality.

These results provide empirical evidence on the importance of considering multiple dimensions of soft skills when assessing employability in Mexican companies. The observed association between cognitive, interpersonal, and emotional control competencies with indicators of job placement, retention, and performance underscores the need to develop comprehensive training strategies in the business sector, although this interpretation is reserved for the discussion section.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate a significant association between various soft skills and employability indicators in the context of Mexican companies. These associations confirm what several authors have analyzed regarding socio-emotional competencies, which are key to improving the chances of remaining in the labor market (Garavito et al., 2024; Guerra-Báez, 2019; Zaracho, 2024).

Thus, the results show that skills such as intuition (V4), innovative thinking (V5 and V7), stress management (V10), self-awareness (V8 and V11), decision-making (V12), and conflict resolution (V2) have statistically significant associations with multiple dimensions of employability (such as V13, V14, V15, V16, V17, V21, and V22). This confirms that employability depends not only on technical or academic skills, but also on interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional abilities, which are key to adaptation, resilience, and effectiveness in complex work environments.

These results also align with the findings of Carhuachin et al. (2024), who found a positive and significant relationship between soft skills and business competitiveness. According to their study, the greater the development of soft skills in managers, the higher the level of competitiveness of the company.

Authors such as Díaz et al. (2021) and the World Health Organization (2025) have already classified these skills into three broad categories: social/interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional self-regulation. In this sense, the study confirms that these skills do not operate in isolation, but rather are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, directly impacting people's employability levels.

Furthermore, studies such as those by Matus and Gutiérrez (2020) distinguish that soft skills are related to profiles that require autonomy, leadership, decision-making and adaptability to change, aspects clearly associated with employability.

Furthermore, stress management (V10) and emotional control (V3) are emerging as critical skills for coping with demanding work environments. Castanyer Mayer-Spiess (2014) highlights that the absence of these competencies can hinder effective communication and conflict resolution, which aligns with the significant associations found in this study between these variables and multiple employability indicators.

According to Haro Esquivel et al. (2024), skills such as effective communication, adaptability to change, and the ability to accept feedback are essential for professional development. This assertion aligns with the findings of this study, which identified

statistically significant associations between various soft skills, such as intuition, innovative thinking, stress management, and emotional control, and multiple employability indicators. In particular, intuition and innovative thinking showed consistent relationships with more than one dimension of the professional profile, reinforcing their cross-cutting importance for retention and growth in the workplace.

These results support the idea that soft skills do not operate in isolation, but rather are interconnected to facilitate adaptation, decision-making, and continuous improvement—key aspects of employability. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen these skills both in academic training and in the organizational environment.

Thus, development programs must align with the organization's strategy, objectives, and goals, and for this, a comprehensive view of the human talent context is essential. This approach should include both managers' and leaders' understanding of staff potential and the promotion of a value-oriented organizational culture, which directly boosts competitiveness (Carrera, 2021).

Conclusions

This study fulfills the stated objective by identifying the associations between soft skills and employability, from the perspective of Mexican business managers.

Based on the results obtained, it is concluded that the soft skills showing the strongest associations with employability are decision-making (V12), self-awareness (V8/V11), and stress management (V10). Furthermore, according to managers' perceptions, the ability to understand others' feelings (V1/V2), innovative thinking (V5/V7), intuition (V4), and emotional control (V3, pending inclusion in results) are also relevant .

It is also observed that the recognition, control and analysis of one's own emotions, as well as creative thinking (V9/V14), are associated with the development of intuition and professional experience, critical aspects for employability.

Therefore, it is essential that human capital becomes aware of the importance of soft skills in the workplace, and that they are given the attention and value they deserve within training and organizational processes.

It is important to highlight some practical implications for managers and business leaders, particularly regarding how the strategic use of human capital aligns with competitive advantage.

Furthermore, from a management perspective, soft skills such as self-awareness and the ability to recognize the feelings of others show a positive association with the employability perceived by managers. Therefore, it is advisable that leaders promote the development of soft skills, such as stress management and emotional control, complementing technical training to improve job placement and retention.

This study has some limitations. First, it is based solely on the perceptions of managers, without considering the perspective of employees at the time of hiring; therefore, the relationship between soft skills and employability cannot be determined with certainty.

Furthermore, it was not verified whether managers actually make hiring decisions based on technical or soft skills, nor was their level of knowledge about these competencies and their impact on employability assessed. The effect size was also not reported, and adjustments for multiple tests were not applied, which should be considered a statistical limitation.

Therefore, it is essential that leaders also receive training in the identification and application of soft skills, as well as how to integrate them into the processes of selection and development of human talent.

Future lines of research

This research allows us to identify future lines of inquiry focused on SMEs across various productive sectors. It is pertinent to delve deeper into the analysis of specific soft skills, such as recognizing, controlling, and understanding the consequences of one's own emotions, as well as innovative thinking (V5/V7), since these could be associated with intuition and professional experience, strengthening employability as a competitive advantage for companies.

Research can also explore employees' perceptions of how they develop and apply these skills in their work. Another avenue is to analyze the integration of soft skills in universities, evaluating their impact on job searching and performance. Similarly, studying these competencies in different organizational contexts and hierarchical levels will allow for the development of more precise strategies to strengthen human capital and business competitiveness.

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