
General introduction

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Maite Durán Fabré

Recommended minimum time required: 0.5 hours



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Introduction

1. Soft skills and emotional intelligence

Goleman (1996) popularised the term of emotional intelligence through his best seller that he published under the same name. Prior to him, researchers like Beldoch (1964), Leuner (1966), and Payne (1985), were already using the concept. Goleman, in particular, worked from the research by Salovey and Mayer (1990) which has continued to be studied and has provided knowledge to other researchers throughout the years.

Following Goleman's (1996) model, emotional intelligence consists of:

- 1) Identifying your own emotions (being aware of them when they happen and how they influence you = emotional self awareness).
- 2) Managing your emotions to enable you to express them in an appropriate way (self-regulation).
- 3) Motivating yourself.
- 4) Recognising emotions in others (empathy).
- 5) Creating interpersonal relationships (social competencies, social skills, leadership).

When we speak about skills, we can distinguish between:

- a) **Hard skills:** These are the personal skills that are needed to carry out a determined task. They are based on previous knowledge, technical skills, specific knowledge and prior learning. All of these abilities relate to the left hemisphere of the brain.
- b) **Soft skills:** These are those interpersonal skills and abilities that are involved when relating to others (relationships, communication) and which provide adaptability to changes (flexibility). They relate to emotional intelligence and the right hemisphere of the brain.

Soft skills enable you to efficiently and effectively communicate, lead projects, supervise people, practise active listening, motivate, resolve conflict, manage time, lead meetings, deliver public presentations, make decisions, work in a team, possess critical thinking, increase flexibility, have self-control, be proactive, have empathy and be curious.

These are skills that are difficult to measure and are gained through education, training, coaching, mentoring and practice.

As can be seen, hard skills and soft skills complement each other.

To be able to lead thesis projects that are presented to them by PhD students, thesis supervisors need to manage soft skills to persuade, train, inspire, inform, mentor and tackle PhD students when making decisions and supporting them through the long, arduous work involved in a doctoral thesis.

Andy Wible. *Strengthening Soft Skills*. TedxTalks

Source: <https://youtu.be/gkLsn4ddmTs?list=PL2n89DCIolGAXtotA-U6PwusRW85mLN36>

2. Motivation to change. The comfort zone as a supervisor

“People can be divided into two: those that have a YES or those that have a NO written inside them. And that determines everything. The important thing is that it can be changed”. Seligman (2002)

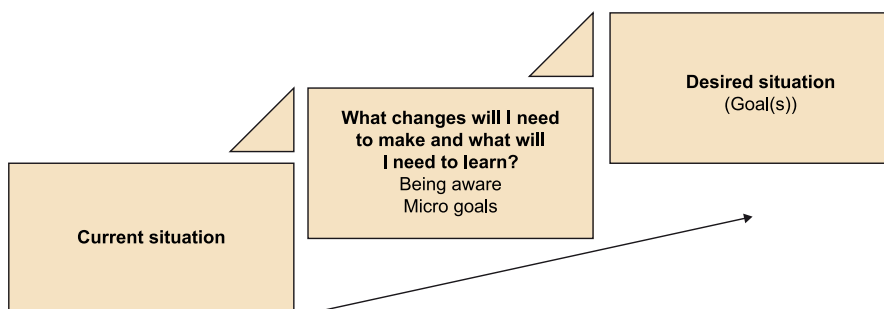
Any change process must be accompanied by **motivation**.

Motivation means that which drives you to carry out actions to achieve your goals that you have set yourself.

This implies that, behind it, there lies a need, an intention, a degree of activation, a commitment and one or more clear goals.

What motivates you to learn new things, change your way of “doing things”, to want to improve or grow both on a professional and a personal level?

An initial approach must involve analysing the following situation:



Current situation: to this day, in what situation do I find myself? What is compelling me to move forward? What is stopping me from feeling more satisfied? What do I have to do to improve? It means analysing your current situation as a thesis supervisor to make you aware (self-awareness) of the aspects that you wish to improve upon. Ultimately, you discover your potential in order to improve your performance.

Desired situation: What do I want to achieve? What aspects do I want to improve? What do I want to free up? What do I want to foster? As a thesis supervisor, what aspects would optimise my performance as regards managing PhD students and their work?

Distance between the current and the desired situations: In order to progress from the current situation to the future one, you need to be aware of your skills and abilities to allow you to carry out actions that will help you to achieve your goals.

For this reason, we are going to use methodologies that are based on coaching throughout this course.

In his prologue cited in Olivé (2010), Dilts says:

“Coaching is the process of helping people and teams to perform at the peak of their abilities. It involves drawing out people’s strengths, helping them to bypass personal barriers and limits in order to achieve their personal best, and facilitating them to function more effectively as members of a team”. [...] “Coaching methodologies are outcome-oriented rather than problem-oriented... concentrating on defining and achieving specific goals”.

Girl motivated in front of a mirror in the morning. Yes it is possible.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lys1rd8ri8Q>

The comfort zone

Normally, when you find yourself in your current situation, you are in your comfort zone.

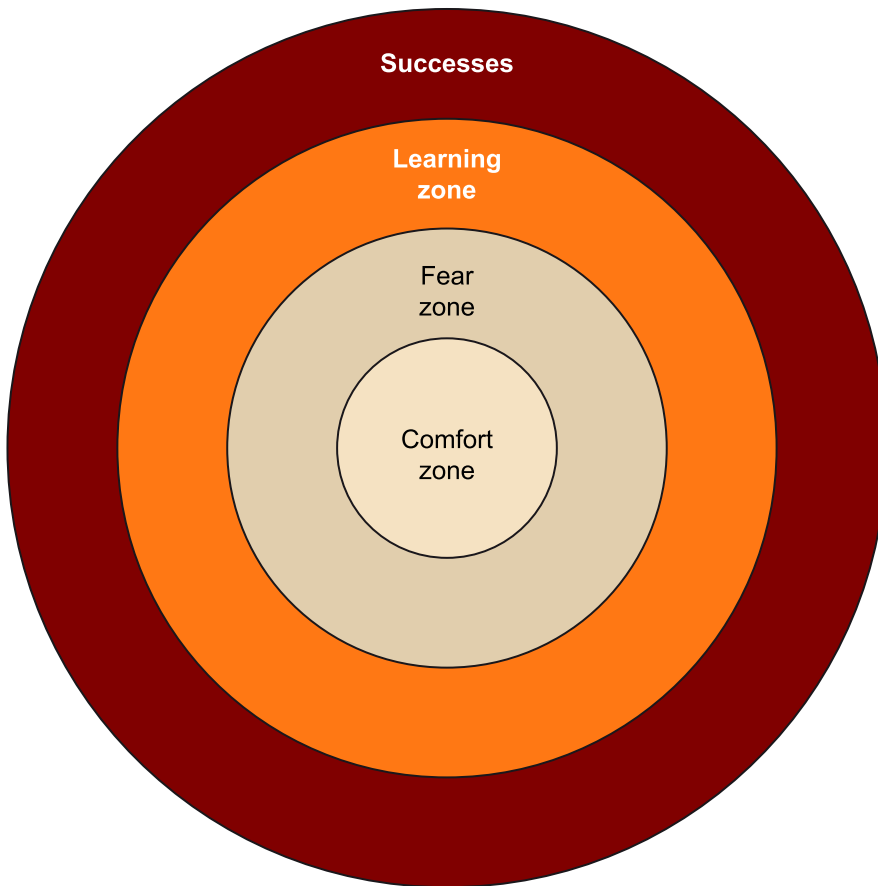
The comfort zone is “a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk”, states White (2009).

This means that where you are used to doing something in a normal way, this therefore makes you feel secure, with a sense of control over situations that are presented to you. We’re not only talking about the things that you do, but also the way in which you think and feel (hence the need to work on beliefs and limiting emotions).

If you remain in this comfort zone for a certain amount of time, this can bring you to a standstill and close your mind off to new initiatives (which may open you up to risk).

Reflection

On a personal level, what motivated you to do this course? And on a professional level? What do you want to achieve or improve? How do you see yourself when you’ve finished this course? What drives you?



We're going to look at the different zones:

1) **Comfort zone:** You feel comfortable, it reassures you. It represents the limit of your CURRENT experiences. In truth, when you leave it, your comfort zone is gradually expanded.

2) **Fear zone:** Leaving your comfort zone involves daring to venture, by taking a step towards the unknown, which makes you fearful. Feelings of insecurity emerge, as well as your internal voice of fear (I can't, I won't know anything, actually I don't need to... all the excuses to avoid facing up to change and taking refuge in whatever you can control).

3) **Learning zone:** New challenges compel you to learn new skills, and to develop a new way of viewing reality, thinking, feeling, and doing.

4) **Successes:** At this point, you reach your goal, whatever challenge you'd set yourself, whatever ability you wanted to develop, your dream.

In truth, when you leave it, your comfort zone is gradually expanded. In other words, every step that you take towards a new challenge or a new change, this leads to experience and you gradually expand your comfort zone, meaning **you grow**.

“Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience”. Paulo Coelho

Reflection

In your role as a supervisor, what elements define your comfort zone? How do you feel in your comfort zone? To what degree do you feel comfortable? What makes you feel comfortable? What excuses do you find to stay in your comfort zone? What challenges do you face as a thesis supervisor? What do you hope to learn?

3. Being aware

Being aware is key and this acts as the starting point for any process involving change, improvement or learning.

Awareness is the ability to realise or notice something.

As Stephen Covey (1989) states: “Every human has four endowments: self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom. The power to choose, to respond, to change”.

Only by realising what you can improve, learn or change, can **you choose**, whether you stay in your comfort zone or if you perform actions to achieve such improvements. By being aware, **you also assume responsibility for the consequences** (I choose to stay in my comfort zone or I choose to go for what I want).

Awareness is developed by being *self-aware*.

In order to develop awareness and self-awareness, you need to gain knowledge through observation and reflection.

Being aware involves keen observation in order to:

- 1) Understand what is going on around you.
- 2) Understand what is happening inside you.

To become aware, the key lies in:

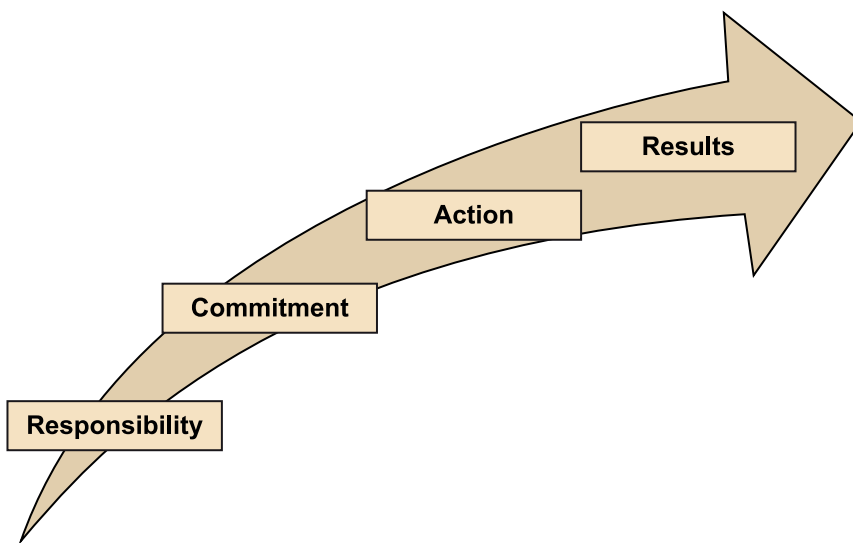
- 1) Asking yourself serious questions (Robbins, 2007).
- 2) Practising active listening.
- 3) Giving and receiving feedback.

We will examine these 3 points in modules 6 and 7.

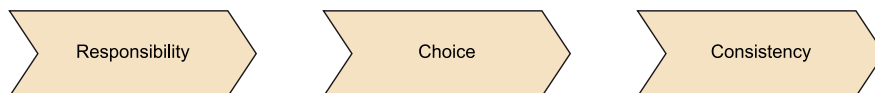
4. Circle of Influence

You have a responsibility to yourself, which is understood to be having the abilities of freedom and choice.

By becoming responsible for whatever it is that you want to change or improve, it means making a commitment to an action taking place, where you will carry out micro goals or tasks to achieve the proposed goal. These actions will deliver results.



So if you are responsible for your choices (you are aware of them), then it means that you are protagonists of them and this means, in the event of failure, not dodging the issue i.e. not playing the role of the victim.



In order to become aware of what your level of responsibility may be, you need to explore what you invest your time and energy in.

We all have our personal set of worries, whether they be personal, professional, family related, political or social etc. This is my **Circle of Concern** (e.g. the education of my children, one of my PhD student's projects, my parents' health, world peace).

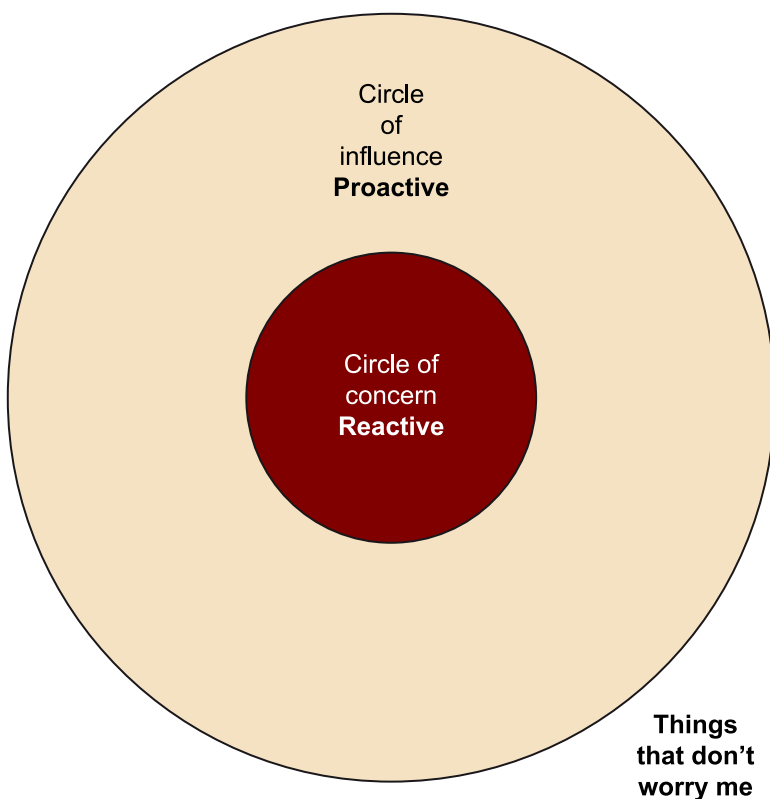
In the centre of the circle of concern, there is the **Circle of Influence** which is where all the things that worry you are located and in which you also have the ability to influence their outcome (e.g. the education of my children, improving my relationship with my partner and with my PhD student, project x, my personal development etc.).

If we place ourselves inside the Circle of Influence, we are the true **protagonists** given that we can create, induce or influence what happens inside it. Proactive people exhibit positive energy and they end up widening this sphere.

By living in the Circle of Concern, you become a **victim** of it as the

things within it are not within your power. Reactive people focus on problems around them, the difficulties of others and on the circumstances over which they have no control. They exhibit negative energy and they make their circle of influence shrink smaller.

When you focus on your Circle of Influence, you focus on your own paradigms, creating actions and changes in yourself that also have repercussions on everything and everyone around you.



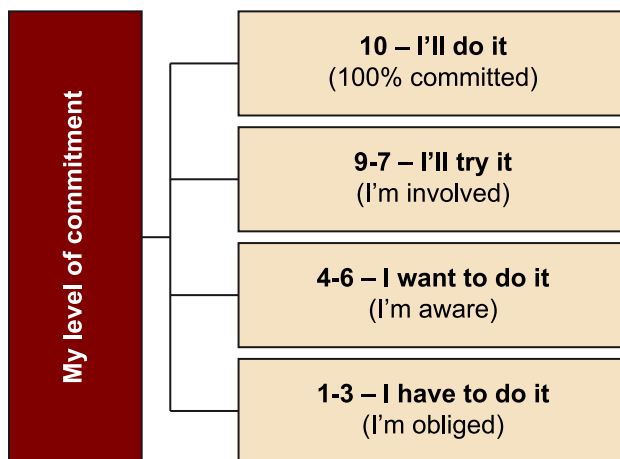
Reflection

Make your own circle of influence and circle of concern and reflect on it. Can you move any of the concerns into the circle of influence? What do you need in order to do it? Who can help you? Is now the time?

5. Scale of commitment

In order to carry out any action, you need commitment.

If there is no commitment, there is no movement, change or improvement. Usually, it is when you hear “I’ll try” instead of “I’ll do it”. If there is commitment, you won’t merely try it, you’ll directly go for it, however hard it may be.



From 1 to 3. I am obliged. This involves laziness and you invent any excuse to avoid tackling it.

From 4 to 6. I’m aware and I want to learn... However, it is not a priority.

From 7 to 9. I’m going to get involved. But I’m not going to commit everything. I might already be planning for it to fail.

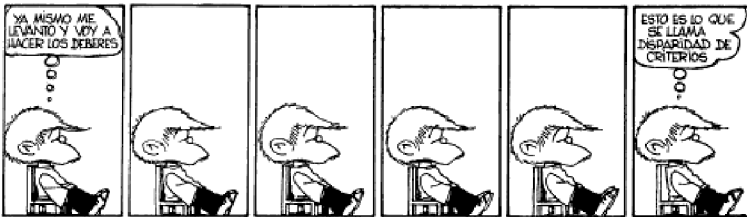
10. I am committed and I’m going to enjoy the process as well as trying to achieve my established learning objectives.

Reflection

What is your level of commitment towards this course content?

6. The stages of change

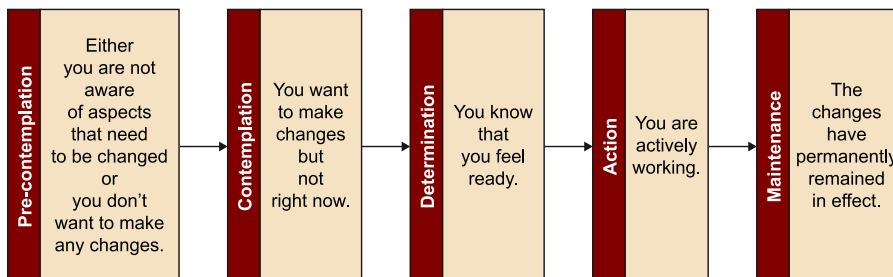
Personal growth and development can provide an answer to the challenges and opportunities that life offers us.



Source: Quino. *Mafalda*. Taken from Google Images.

Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) describe a process model of the different changes that a person experiences when they want to move through from one problem behaviour to another and when they do not.

These stages of change are comparable to the phases of motivation towards change.



As every one of us is unique and incomparable, it must be borne in mind that every person has their own pace of work and pace of change, which will be modulated by our previous experiences, personality, nature and temperament.

