



**Developing non-technical skills through designed
experiential learning**

Participatory research in a Balkan healthcare context

av

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Abstract

Rapid changes in population health needs have increased the importance of understanding how healthcare institutions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) support the development of healthcare professionals' competencies. While traditional training has primarily emphasised clinical and technical skills, healthcare systems in LMICs often face additional challenges related to limited resources, entrenched hierarchies, and complex cultural contexts. These conditions highlight the need to better understand the development of non-technical skills (NTSs), including communication, teamwork, leadership, and interprofessional collaboration.

This thesis examines how healthcare professionals understand and develop NTSs, with particular attention to leadership and interprofessional collaboration within healthcare settings in the Balkan region and in the context of international healthcare partnerships in Sweden. The study applies a designed experiential learning approach grounded in participatory and interactive educational practices. Kolb's experiential learning theory serves as the overarching conceptual framework and is applied across individual, team, and organisational levels, with surveys-used to stimulate dialogue.

The thesis is presented as a compilation, consisting of an introduction and four empirical studies employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations.

The findings indicate that designed experiential learning approaches effectively foster the development and understanding of NTSs. These skills develop in ways that are closely shaped by organisational structures and cultural contexts. The results contribute to a growing body of evidence supporting experiential, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches in healthcare education and suggest that traditional dyadic mentoring alone is insufficient to support professional development in increasingly complex healthcare environments.

Keywords: non-technical skills, experiential learning, healthcare professionals, survey-based experiential learning.