



A STUDY ON THE “SOFT SKILL REQUIREMENTS” AND SUGGESTED TRAINING FOR STUDENT COMMUNITY AT COLLEGES IN TODAY’S CONTEXT

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Abstract

India is one of the few developing countries having huge manpower resources in the present situation, but, ironically, the talents are not tapped, directed nor utilized. The youth of today are having the required qualifications and a small, yet appreciable or slightly less percentage of youngsters, compared to the size of qualified personal are getting good job opportunities as well. This situation laments in every sector or different verticals in many sectors. Employers prefer to hire and retain, promote those persons who are resourceful, ethical and self directed with good ‘soft skills’. Hard skills and experience are not only the pre-requirement for gaining access or entry and improving their scalability in the corporate world. In spite of such great significance of soft skills many educational institutions are still reluctant to include soft skills training in the curriculum. There are some exceptions to this, as some private to be deemed universities have credit papers or marks assigned to this and embedded in their academics. The issue of employability of graduates has become very serious and critical. Audibert and James emphasize the importance of soft skills for employees to retain in their positions as “Soft skills such as leadership, communication, teambuilding and entrepreneurial interest have become critical for hiring and promoting employees to keep positions”

The employability skills in students may be markedly improved, possibly by inculcating some skills, from many soft skills like: communications, improving managerial ability and tasks, innovation and creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, empathy, time management, values & ethics, stress management.

This paper attempts to emphasize the necessity of incorporating soft skills training programs in curriculum of educational institutions, highlighting the objectives of soft skills techniques teaching methods to be applied. If given such an importance, what would be the methodology, area of focus etc; this paper also may throw light on the need of soft skills training programs in colleges and workplaces and need to reduce these lacunae that is exists in the students by introducing such training programs. The paper also puts forward some suggestions for making above initiatives more effective for developing students fully equipped with relevant soft skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Personality Development, Training Module, Employability Training.

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world, where there is a strong need for performance management and excellence, to realize this, it has become imperative to sharpen one's technical skills, as well as more importantly, one's soft skills and the skills required to crack the screening tests conducted by corporate houses, at the entry level, and also for individual growth and scalability. Technical skills may be learnt, applied and measured to an established qualification. But the same cannot be said of the skills represented as soft skills. Soft skill can be broadly defined as ‘personal attributes that enhance an individual’s interactions, job and career prospects’. Whether it involves face to face customer interaction or even indirect correspondence over telephone or e-mail, employees adept at soft skills will achieve both individual as well as organizational success. Hence soft skills is critical to showcasing one's hard skills; both can be considered to be two sides of the same coin - one without the other has no impact.



THE BACKGROUND

When we try to study about soft skills from various literatures we find that very relevant references have been cited by many thinkers, as 'corporate requirements are such that they look specifically for those candidates who can add value to their organization with their soft skills and the ability to develop and use soft skills which can make the difference between a job offer and enjoyment of new employment'. This requirement of soft skills in a job has made the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability tighter and tougher, where there is very little margin for error. HR departments rate soft skills, such as interpersonal skills, communication skills and management skills, as some of the most valuable skills they look for when selecting new employees. However employees with well-developed soft skills are hard to find, and once people have joined the organization, employers struggle to provide training in these areas.

This means that there's a real gap between the soft skills the organization needs, and the skills employees have. Looked at positively, this means that there's a huge opportunity for organizations to improve productivity and profitability by bridging this gap.

All those candidates who wish to get an edge over their competitor are expected to refine their soft skills This view point is substantiated by Hewitt Sean (2008) that, employers value soft skills because they are just as good as indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications. So today's professionals need to encompass a high soft skills quotient, apart from the domain knowledge in order to succeed in today's' competition. For inculcating soft skills in them they have to be provided with trainings as a part of their curriculum. This in turn will help them to improve their complete personality and compatibility therefore enabling them to secure a respectable position in the corporate world.

Irrespective of the professional qualification and apart from the domain knowledge, today's professionals need to possess a high Soft Skills quotient in order to succeed in this competitive era. Hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while remaining 85% is made by soft skill (Watts M and Watts R. K, 2008).

The Center for Career Opportunities at Purdue University defines soft skills as "the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees." Their list of soft skills includes work ethic, courtesy, teamwork, self discipline, self -confidence, conformity to prevailing norms, and language proficiency. Soft skills are different and distinct from Hard Skills. Soft skills are those skills that add more value to the hard skills adorned by an individual.

In spite of such great relevance of soft skills in the present corporate world many institutions are yet to introduce soft skills in their curriculum, even though studies and findings suggest that there is a dire need of incorporating soft skills trainings in their curriculum, to ensure commendable placements, According to Hewitt Sean (2008) soft skills are "non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills" which determines an individual's strength as "a leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator". Soft skills are the traits and abilities of attitude and behaviour rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude (Tobin, 2006).

Martin Carole (2008) comments that hard skills are more "along the lines of what might appear on your (one's) resume" whereas soft skills are "cluster of personality traits, social graces, personal habits, friendliness and optimism." Soft skills are not a substitute for hard or technical skills, but they act as harmonizing skills that serve up to unlock the prospective for highly effective performance in people even with good hard skills.

THE NEED OF DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS

Technical and job-related skills are a must, but they are not sufficient when it comes to progressing up the ladder. Soft skills play a very important role in this vigorous commercial epoch. Today there is a huge mass of qualified job seekers existing in the society and the competition within them for job acquisition and job sustainability is



becoming tougher. To get an edge over the competitors they are left with no other choice but to add worth to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. If one has got advanced soft skills then definitely he will be able to establish themselves as distinct amongst other job seekers.

Concerning the importance of including soft skills in colleges, Thacker and Yost (2002) noted that students require training to be effective team members. Employers often come across that "business graduates lack good team leadership skills". Likewise, according to Knell and et.al.(2007) employers are continually asking for a work force rich in creativity, communication skills and cultural understanding.

The NASSCOM Mc- KINSEY 2013 reported that shortages in soft skills , including communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, high order thinking, responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills as they found only 25% of students from engineering colleges are directly employable and the situation has not changed in the last five years in India. Poor soft skills like communication skills create a negative impression with employers during the recruitment phase and may exclude a graduate with good technical skills from being selected for employment (Pauw and et al, 2006).

Today lack of competence in soft skill is marked as one of the reasons of poor rate of employability of technical graduates though it is true that soft skill need to be inculcated at a very young age at home but the role of soft skill training in schools and colleges cannot be ignored. It's a not something new, even in the last few years of the past, we have seen some kind of training been driven on ad hock basis, as and when the much awaited 'season for recruitment' approaches colleges; the training irrespective of the target group, the company, its requirements, IT sector, or ITES ,which is also called as IT enabled sector or the institution where it is imparted, soft skills training programs were programmed to marginally improve the soft skills of the students who are lined up by the college for placing the students in the corporate. But eventually not every student is successful in making it to the corporate, more importantly many a times there were reports of attrition for the corporate houses, as the recruits were found to less be accommodative, short of soft skills and had inadequate skill sets to adapt to the needs of the employment.

Thus we believed that there is a pressing need to develop students in building their soft skills thereby has made us to attempt to try the process of 'Soft skill training' through a structured a training module, Which would possibly give the trainees a whole range of skills, like assertiveness, negotiation skills, communication skills and the skill to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. As such it's felt as these Soft skills as those capabilities that are inherent in an individual. These competencies or skill sets does exist in every individual to a particular level. But if these skills are not used or if the individual who adorns these skills is unaware of it then that individual will never be able to utilize his / her inherent skills. The aim of any soft skills training program is to remove these blocks or the barriers that prevent the individual from utilizing his/ her skills. Soft skills training will make the individual aware of his / her hidden capabilities and to refine it for the overall development and success of the individual. Everyone can get benefit from the soft skills training irrespective of the skills they have inherited, irrespective of their place of work, area of work & conditions. In fact the best training would be exposed mostly when one is put to testing tough conditions of real time work environment. Personality development and soft skills at the 'Soft Skills training programs' should be imparted to fine-tune the students' attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, feelings, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation, flexibility, persuasion, futuristic thinking, diplomacy, and various skill sets of communication, manners, and etiquette so that they will be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly.

OBJECTIVES FOR SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPING PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS

To:

- I. Develop effective communication skills
- II. Develop effective presentation skills.



- III. Make students become self-confident individuals by mastering inter-personal, team management, and leadership skills.
- IV. Develop all-round personality with a mature outlook to function effectively in different circumstances.
- V. Develop broad career plans, evaluate the employment market, identify the organizations to get good placement, match the job requirements and skill sets.
- VI. Make the students take part effectively in various selection procedures adopted by the recruiters.

Also we aimed in developing Personality of students through Training in three specific modules:

- a. Business communication
- b. Behavioural Skills
- c. Training in Group Discussion and Personal Interview

The Process

The training in soft skills has two parts. One part involves developing attitudes and attributes, and the other part involves fine-tuning communication skills to express attitudes, ideas, and thoughts well. The first part training skills empower them to understand "who they are" and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation.

The second is crucial to successful work, which may be the perfect integration of ideas and attitudes with appropriate communication skills in oral, written, and non-verbal areas. Attitudes and skills are integral to soft skills. Each one influences and complements the other. Grooming of the students should begin with a preliminary test in the English language to determine their level of competence in the use of English for effective communication both oral and written. The idea is to ensure that students are oriented to understand that a manager's key job is to be able to express clearly, correctly, and concisely. To achieve optimum results module has to be made for training programs giving stress on language, communication skills and behavioural skills.

Training in attitudinal or behavioural skills array of skills related to personal growth for efficient functioning constitutes the training. Students are made to realize their strengths and weaknesses so that they are able to grasp the true essence of development. This module covers the following areas: Psychological Tests: Aptitude and personality assessment, suggestions for improvement. Team Skills: Team building and leadership, evolution of groups into teams, group dynamics, and emergence of leadership, intra-group dynamics, inter-group dynamics, and conflict management; inter dependency, assessment of team-based projects. Time Management: Pareto's Principle, Parkinson's Laws, Murphy's Laws, Law of Clutter, prioritization, goal setting, effective time management. Interpersonal Skills: Negotiations, listening skills, social skills, assertive skills, cross-cultural communications. Leadership Skills: Concepts of leadership, leadership styles, insights from great leaders.

As a result student would possibly realize that punctuality, goal management, collaborative team skills, and listening skills, are important facets of a well-rounded personality. Self-awareness programs enhance the students' personality these soft skills are enormously valued in business organizations. As employment conditions become tougher, potential recruiters look for personal attributes like attitude and values. Training in Group Discussion (the GD's) and Personal Interview (PI) is given through conducting series of simulated 'mock sessions' before the students go through real job interviews, they are made to go through a series of practice sessions on GD and PI. Feedback is given to the students later for a realistic understanding of industry expectations.

Teaching methods in the soft skills training may include lectures, projects, role plays, quizzes, and various other participatory sessions. The emphasis will be on learning by doing. Since the method of training is experiential and highly interactive, the students absorb the skills and attributes in a measured and subtle way over the duration of the program. The students will not only learn the skills and attributes but also internalize them over a period of time. Internalization ensures that the skills and attributes become part of the students' nature. Subtle changes are bound to occur in their behaviour and outlook, and these will make them more self-assured and confident.



Moreover, the behaviour changes will be gradual and natural and will not appear artificial or put on. Thus, the changes in them will be genuine and positive.

Suggestions from teachers from colleges were to have a “Method of Evaluation” of the Soft Skills training program, if it is a credit course and the evaluation of the students can take place on a periodical basis, with the record of their performance maintained and published as results and showing the progress or scope for improvements. Active participation in activities, interest displayed by the students in acquiring the necessary attributes and skills and the commitment shown by them to improve in terms of attitudes are the main criteria for evaluation. The effectiveness of the training session is enhanced through a two-way feedback. Wherever necessary, the trainer gives feedback to individual students on their performance and to the class in general. In turn, the students also give feedback on the training sessions. They are encouraged to give suggestions regarding the content and the delivery of the training sessions so that improvements can be made in the modules from time to time if necessary. The counsellors in the system, if they are present, may also give a feedback to the students on their strengths and the areas where development is needed.

To sum up, Soft skills like effective communication and interpersonal skills are crucial to increase employment opportunities and to compete successfully in the business environment .The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their domain knowledge into effective practice. Under these conditions and context, we strongly believe that soft skills have a crucial role to play. To enhance or to hone soft skill traits among students some training modules has to be made at college level.

Eventually to wrap up, Soft skills program is about enabling and empowerment. With these training programs students’ will possibly has/have a nice metamorphosis from aspiring students to young successful managers.

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