



TRAINING: An Indispensable Tool For The Development Of Soft Skills Constituting Communication Skills Of Engineering Students And Professionals

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Abstract

Among the developing and fast growing countries, India is one having a great deal of manpower resources but it is not being correctly rummage sold. The fresh generation has got abundant qualification and a considerable proportion of youth are getting decent job opportunities also. But the cluster which is on the average neck and neck is just having the vision of getting an employment. Employers desire to hire and endorse those people who are ingenious, principled and self-directed with good soft skills. Hard skills and experience are not sufficient for the entrance and growth in the corporate world. In spite of such great significance of soft skills, many organizations and institutions are unenthusiastic and show ignorance to embrace the required and demanding above said training in the curriculum. The issue of employability of graduates has become very serious and critical. Soft skills fulfill an important role in shaping an individual's personality. It is of high importance for every student to acquire adequate skills beyond academic or technical knowledge. This paper highlights the inevitability of integrating soft skills training programs in curriculum, emphasizing the objectives of same skills and numerous teaching methods to be applied.

Key words: communication skills, job market, module, methods, soft skills.



Introduction

For decades employers as well as educators frequently complain about a lack in soft skills among graduates from tertiary education institutions. Predominantly missed is communication skills, but additional knowledge in business or project management is also ranking highly on the list of missing skills desirable for graduates entering the business world (Bernd Schulz 2008). Soft skill is a sociological term for an individual's Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and communication skill is an integral part of it. It 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 along with effective communication skills will achieve both individual as well as organizational success. Hence, soft skills are critical to showcasing ones hard skills; both can be considered to be two sides of the same coin - one without the other has no impact.

Modern 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 which comprises communication skills in a job has made the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability tougher. All those candidates who wish to get an edge over their competitor are expected to refine their skills. Employers value soft skills because they are just as good as indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications (Arun Korath 2014). So today's professionals need to encompass a high soft skills quotient, apart from the domain knowledge in order to succeed in this competitive era. For inculcating soft skills and communication skills in them, they have to be provided with trainings as a part of their curriculum. This in turn will help them improve their complete personality and compatibility 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 and communication skills quotient in order to succeed in this competitive era. In spite of such



great relevance of soft skills and communication skills in the present corporate world, some of the institutions are yet to introduce soft skills in their curriculum. There is a dire need of incorporating soft skills along with communication skills trainings in their curriculum, to ensure commendable placements.

Elucidation

Soft skills are fundamentally considered to be people's skills or personality specific skills. 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 behavior rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude (Tobin, 2006). The Center for Career Opportunities at Shikha Seetha 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 poles apart and distinct from Hard Skills. Soft skills are those skills that augment added significance to the hard skills festooned by an individual. It is commented that hard skills are more "along the lines of what might appear on your resume" whereas soft skills are "cluster of personality traits, social graces, personal habits, friendliness and optimism." Soft skills are not a supernumerary for hard or technical skills, but they act as congruent skills that serve up to get to the bottom of the prospective for extremely effective performance in people even with good hard skills (Dr. Shikha Seetha 2003).

What are the most important soft skills?

The answer regarding the importance of soft skills depends very much on the context and one's personal perception. However, there is one property that immediately comes to most people's mind when soft skills are mentioned: those are the communication skills. And indeed, it is the talent of communication skills, which is mostly lacking among graduates from colleges and universities. When asking people what exactly they



understand to be communication skills, one will receive a wide range of answers, because communication skills include a lot of different aspects (Bernd Schulz 2008).

Necessity of Intensifying Soft Skills

Technical and job-related skills are obviously more mandatory, on the other hand they are not adequate when it comes to progressing up the ladder. Soft skills play a very imperative role in this energetic commercial era. In the present day, there is a titanic mass of competent job seekers existing in the social order and the competition surrounded by them for job procurement and job maintainability is becoming hard-hitting. To get an edge over the competitors, they are left with no further choice but to add value to their hard skills with soft skills to parade their true potential. A person who has got forward-thinking soft skills will definitely be able to establish as distinct in the midst of other job hunters.

In relation to the prominence 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". It is obvious that employers are continually asking for a work force rich in creativity, communication skills and cultural understanding. The National Employers Skills Survey 2003, reported that employers regard shortages in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills. It is also a fact that 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.

Soft Skills Training Programs- A Rudimentary Prerequisite

Nowadays deficiency of know-how in soft skill is marked as one of the major reasons of pitiable rate of employability of technical graduates. Though it is factual that soft skills have to be impressed upon at a very young age at home, the role of soft skill training in schools and colleges cannot be overlooked. Notwithstanding the target group or the institution where it is imparted, soft skills training programs aim to progress a complete array of skills, like assertiveness, negotiation skills, communication skills and the skill to



establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Soft skills are professed as those capabilities that are intrinsic in an individual. These competencies exist in every single 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. All and sundry can get benefit from the soft skills training regardless of the skills they have inherited.

Objectives of Soft Skills Training Program

- i) Developing effective communication skills
- ii) Developing effective presentation skills.
- iii) Conducting effective business correspondence and preparing business reports which produce results.
- iv) Becoming self-confident individuals by mastering inter-personal, team management, and leadership skills.
- v) Developing all-round personality with a mature outlook to function effectively in different circumstances.
- vi) Developing broad career plans, evaluate the employment market, identify the organizations to get good placement, match the job requirements and skill sets.
- vii) Taking part effectively in various selection procedures adopted by the recruiters.

Personality development and soft skills

At the Soft Skills training programs, training 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. Soft skills strengthen



them from within. These skills empower them to understand "who they are" and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation.

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. Crucial to successful work is 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. It will be very effective when one learns to listen and read (Receptive skills) before attempting to speak and write (Productive skills). This emphasizes that effective output is more possible when there is proper input. This method of learning can be helpful in delivering the idea fluently and spontaneously emphasizing more self-confidence. The idea is to ensure that students are oriented to understand that a manager's key job is to be able to express himself clearly, correctly, and concisely. To achieve optimum results, module has to be made for training programs giving stress on language, communication skills and behavioral skills.

Personality Development through Soft Skills Training should be conducted in three modules:

- 1) Business communication
- 2) Behavioral Skills
- 3) Training in Group Discussion and Personal Interview

I. Business Communication covers the following areas: Communications skills, current English usage, debates, language games, situational dialogues, précis writing, essay writing, presentations (Preparing for effective presentations, presentation for small groups and large groups, marketing and business presentations). Business Correspondence



(Principles of clear writing, often misused words, applications and requests, routine messages, memos, report writing, organizing meetings, preparation of agenda and minutes, business etiquette, telephone etiquette, e-mail etiquette).

As a result, the students will soon realize that fluency and command over speaking and writing gives them an edge while interacting with people at all levels.

II. Behavioral skills: An assortment of skills associated to personal progress for well-organized 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, emergence of leadership, intra-group dynamics, inter-group dynamics, conflict management, inter dependency and assessment of team-based projects.

Time Management: Pareto's Principle, Parkinson's Laws, Murphy's Laws, Law of Clutter, prioritization, goal setting and effective time management.

Interpersonal Skills: Negotiations, listening skills, social skills, assertive skills and cross-cultural communications.

Leadership Skills: Concepts of leadership, leadership styles and insights from great leaders.

Consequently, students understand that punctuality, goal management, collaborative team skills, and listening skills are imperative surfaces of a well-rounded personality.

Self-awareness programs augment the students' personality. These soft skills are enormously valued in business organizations. As employment conditions turn out to be tougher, potential recruiters hunt for personal attributes like attitude and values.

Group Discussion and Personal Interview



Before the students go through real job interviews, they are made to go through a series of practice sessions on GD and PI. Feedback can be given to the students later for a realistic understanding of industry expectations.

It covers the following areas: Selection Process: Overview of selection process, practice of psychological tests, effective resume writing, dealing with placement consultants and headhunters, references – how to get effective references from past and current employers.

Group Discussions: Concepts and Practice.

Interview Techniques: Effective interview techniques, mock interviews, stress interviews, review and feedback.

As a result, Students aspire to obtain fulfilling and rewarding campus placements. How the students fare in the campus placement interviews depends on how well they are able to internalize the personality development techniques. If they internalize the techniques thoroughly, they have a good chance of getting great placements.

Methods of Teaching

The methods of teaching in the soft skills training should comprise lectures, projects, role plays, quizzes, and a number of other participatory sessions. The weight should be on learning by doing. Since the method of training is experiential and highly interactive, the students take in the skills and attributes in a steady and elusive 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 behavior and outlook, and these will make them more self-assured and confident. Moreover, the behavior changes will be gradual and natural and will not appear artificial or put on. Thus, the changes in them will be genuine and positive.

Method of Evaluation



The Soft Skills training program is a credit course and the evaluation of the students takes place on a continuous basis. 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 heightened through a two-way opinion. Wherever needed, 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. This can help in improving the quality and essence of the modules from time to time if indispensable. The counselors will also give a feedback to the students on their strengths and the areas where development is needed.

Conclusion

Highly commendable communication and interpersonal skills are very vital to upsurge employment odds and to vie efficaciously in the business milieu .The ability to put their domain knowledge into effective practice is considered to be the most important and real key to the effectiveness of professionals . In this framework, soft skills has a decisive part to play. To augment or to refine soft skill traits amongst students, some training modules have to be planned and incorporated at college level. Thus it is very clear and obvious that the soft skills program is all about enabling and empowerment. Through these training programs, students will definitely have a smooth transition from aspiring students to young successful managers.

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