

Importance of Soft Skills in the employability of IT students

Prof. Ritu Goswami

Assistant Professor

Department of MCA,

Bharti Vidyapeeth's Institute of Management & Information Technology,

C.B.D. Belapur, Navi Mumbai, India

rituprabhu.mathur@gmail.com

Abstract:

Technology is ever-changing. This ever – changing environment requires the IT professional to possess a wide range of technical and non- technical abilities. The companies nowadays expect their employees to combine business skills, analytical thinking and the ability to exhibit expertise in an array of technology areas. The managers and professionals must be technically competent. The technical skills vary depending upon the need of the industry and the changing external environment. At least some technical knowledge is required for every job in the IT industry. It is possible to be successful by being solely competent in only technical skills but one also needs to master the soft skills also to climb up the organizational ladder. The need of the situation is that the students, who are the future product to enter the job market, need to be competent both in hard skills as well as soft skills.

This is a conceptual paper emphasizing on the need of soft skills for the students entering the IT world.

Key words – Information Technology, Soft Skills, Employability

I. Introduction

Soft Skills - A word which is appears to be very simple but has a huge impact on one's success or failure. People misinterpret soft skills for communication skills. It is assumed that if one's communication skills are good, he is fit for the job. Soft Skills are more than that. These are people skills. Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance a person's job performance, interactions and career prospects. How well one interacts with others influences the success of his career. "If you want a job, have technical skills. If you want a career, have people skills."

This paper emphasizes more on the IT students because it has been observed that during their course of studies, more emphasis is given on developing the hard skills in

them. Their curriculum is specifically designed to make them technically very sound but they lack in soft skills. This lack of soft skills learning reflects when they face interviews, presentations and public speaking occasions. They seem to be technically competent but in their jobs, they are expected to work with the company's external partners, external customers and internal customers (i.e. employees in other divisions or in other departments). Rather than performing a specific function, they are more likely to work on a series of projects either in a team environment or individually, in which they will use a variety of skills. For these reasons, today's businesses are looking for employees with "soft skills" as well as "hard" technical knowledge.

One of the major attractions why people choose IT as a career option is high salary associated with the jobs. There is a rise in demand in this segment of industry and due to this; the potential employees in the area of IT have multiple offers of employment. To compete, companies have been forced to offer compensation packages including large signing bonuses and other extras beyond base salary. The individuals with a blend of abilities command the highest salary. Individuals who can integrate networking, project management and teamwork, business technology and specific application skills are valued more as compared to others.

In this paper an attempt is made to investigate the consequences of the lack of learning of soft skills in the IT students and to suggest ways to curb them.

II. Literature Review

Beginning in the early 1980s, management consultants and scholars began challenging the notion that people with high IQs are most likely to have business and career success. Instead, they found that individuals who use what the management journal *The McKinsey Quarterly* called "the soft S's of style, skills, staff, and shared goals" (Watson, 1983) generally outperform

those who rely only on technical knowledge, organizational structures, and systems.

Ongoing research and popular books like Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* and Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind* have built on and expanded this notion. They've argued that for organizations to thrive in today's global, information-based economy, their employees must master the skills needed to connect to and influence others, maintain relationships, and manage and control themselves.

According to the American Society of Training and Development's (ASTD) State of the Industry 2011 report (Green & McGill, 2011), U.S. employers spent \$171.5 billion on employee learning and development in 2010. More than 27.6% of the learning content they provided went to teaching soft skills, including interpersonal (7.49%), customer service (7.35%), and management and supervisory skills (12.83%). [2]

Analyst firms, such as Bersin & Associates, that follow corporate training and development trends have found similar results showing that organizations tend to spend at least 20-25% of their training budgets on soft skills initiatives.

A comprehensive, ongoing soft skills training curriculum that's goal-focused, uses correct pedagogical approaches, and incorporates long-term outcomes tracking is very rare. [1]

A recent McKinsey report estimated that we're going to have a massive shortage of high-skilled workers. They estimate we could have a shortfall of as many as 85 million high- and middle-skilled workers by 2020.[5] [13]

A Harvard University study revealed that 85% of jobs & promotions happened because of the candidate's attitude and only 15% due to the facts and figures he packed under his belt. Within the Indian industry, there is a definite move towards backward integrating academics with the soft-skill needs including communication and team working.

Amit Bhatia, CEO, Aspire Human Capital Management, an education services firm, said there is a wide gap between the skills needed by employers and those possessed by the applicants, thus increasing the unemployment figure. [9]

"The youth have to be skilled to suit the requirement of the industry and training programmes have to be devised to bring out the competencies which are needed by the industry," said Dilip Chenoy, MD and CEO,

National Skill Development Corporation, which is under the Union finance ministry.

Some experts believe that no matter from where the fresher is, three to six months go in training him.

Industry experts say nearly half of the firms will have apprehensions about employability of prospective candidates and don't want to hire and train someone who might just quit within a short duration. "However, 30-40% firms want to hire and train," says Sunil Goel, director, GlobalHunt India, an executive search firm. [8]

Experts say that there are many aspects of soft skills which go beyond spoken English. "Teamwork, integrity and communication with opposite gender are skills which companies expect in a person when he is hired. However, with freshers lacking these skills, companies are left with little choice," said Vinod Prabhu, CEO, Orbinet Technologies, a firm involved in delivering technical education.

Communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, decision-making, and teamwork are the competencies that will allow employees to grow and adapt as the world of work continues to change (Oblinger, 1998)[12]. While there are numerous explanations for the change in criteria for workplace skills, the impact of globalization appears to be one of the most significant causes that appear in many analyses (Rhinesmith, 1996; Williams, 1996). In response to increased global competition and the expansion of the world economy, businesses are seeking workers more highly skilled in the soft skills (Caudron, 1999; Solomon, 1999; Himmelsbach, 1999).[3]

"Many educators will claim that our colleges already provide just such preparation. But if we listen to those who employ our graduates or to educators in graduate and professional schools, we hear that an enormous chasm exists between what higher education claims it is doing and what is actually achieved" (Lavenberg 1997, A64).[10]

Today's managers need a variety of soft skills in communication, negotiation, and team building to effectively manage technological change and corporate stress resulting from downsizing and rapid growth (Deverell, 1994) [1]

III. Problem Statement

This study is designed to determine the extent to which IT educators perceive the importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the education curriculum.

IV. Objectives

- To understand the importance of soft skills for IT students.
- To know why IT students need to learn soft skills.
- To find out ways as to how can students learn and soft skills.
- To evaluate the responsibility of the academicians and educational institutions in providing training of soft skills to students.

V. Research Methodology

This paper is a conceptual one. It is based on the experiences of the author and other subject experts. The data is collected from various sources like journals, reports, magazines, newspapers, websites and research articles written by scholars. According to the data collected from different sources, the findings are explored.

Importance of Soft Skills

In the present scenario, the industry demands have changed. Most of the companies prefer to hire people with a combination of soft skills and hard skills.

Communication skills are the first and foremost of the soft skills because until and unless a person is able to put forth his ideas and explain his thoughts to others in a confident manner, he will not be heard. With communication comes listening. Active listening is also an essential trait of a successful manager. One can reciprocate to others' thoughts or ideas only when he/she listens effectively.

One can become an excellent manager without becoming a good leader, but one cannot be an excellent leader without becoming a good manager. Be it any job, one needs to manage his work properly. Soft skills combine many management skills in it. The most crucial resource that one employs in any job or work is the human resource. Soft skills teach many management skills also which a person needs to incorporate while working to step up the corporate ladder.

One of these is the critical thinking and problem solving skill. This is the ability to identify and analyze problems and find solutions.

Team work results in working and interacting better in a team. It also helps in maintaining better relationships with people and minimizing conflicts.

Time Management, Stress Management and Anger Management complement each other. Time Management helps in bringing efficiency in work, better outputs and proper prioritization of work. This reduces the stress level and pressure under which people work. Consequently the emotional outburst of venting out anger on others due to work pressure also reduces.

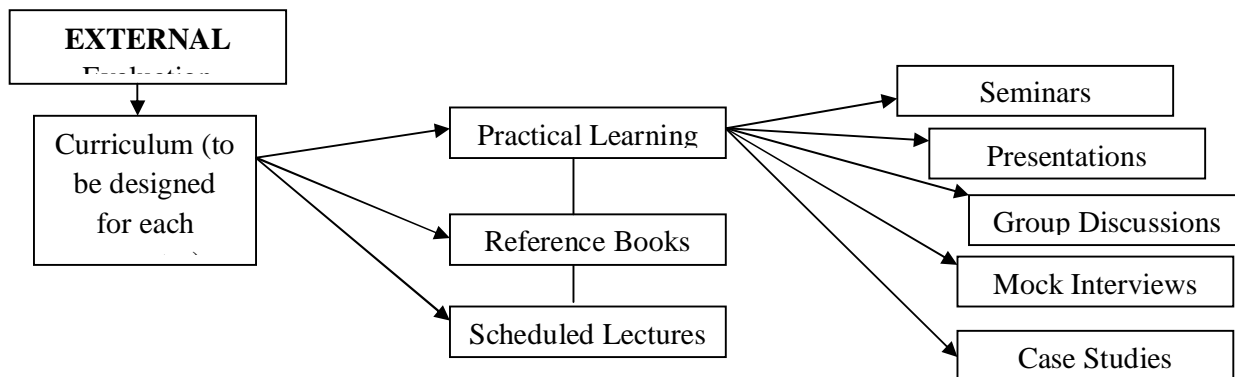
Leadership Skills help the individual to understand and take turns as a leader and follower alternatively while working on projects.

There are many other skills like Decision Making, Motivation, Perception Building, Goal setting which help individuals not only to become enhanced in their professional lives but in their personal lives as well.

The combination of soft skills and hard skills make the individuals balanced in their career prospects. Knowledge of the technical field as well as skills to interact with customers and clients efficiently gives a competitive advantage with others in the job market.

Many companies are also taking the initiative to give soft skills training to their employees but the cost involved and the stability of the employee afterwards is a major concern for these companies. After the training, till what time is the employee going to sustain in the company is still a question to many of them because a huge cost is involved in providing training to the employees. This is the reason why the recruitment companies look out for such employees who are productive right from the starting. Communication Skills are a major point where many applicants find difficulty when they face an interview. Better communication and interpersonal skills bring confidence in the individuals.

Proposed Solution for Imbibing Soft Skills in students



Role of the Educational Institutes and Faculties

Soft Skills are very crucial for success in the present scenario. A great responsibility lies on the shoulders of the faculties and academicians providing education. It is recommended that students should be provided soft skills training right from the beginning of their courses in the post graduation. Each semester soft skills should be incorporated in their syllabus and this should be further taken up for external evaluation. It is observed that internal evaluation of a subject creates a perception in the minds of the students that the subject is less important or does not carry much weight age. They take fewer efforts for learning such subjects as compared to those subjects which have an external evaluation.

Not only in IT education, but soft skills should be made a mandatory subject in every stream of education. Right from the beginning, if the students are taught soft skills, then it will generate a better understanding of the concepts in their mind.

Findings

1. Research proves that lack of soft skills affect the employability of the students in the job market.
2. Students need to be groomed well from the beginning of their courses so that their understanding is better.
3. Educational bodies like the UGC and AICTE need to play a very important role in implementing soft skills as a part of the curriculum in colleges and universities. It must be made a mandatory subject and must be externally evaluated.
4. The syllabus must also be updated from time to time based on the need of the industry.

VI. Conclusion

The study brings to light the importance of soft skills for professional and personal development. In today's world, more and more people are becoming aware of the indispensable nature of soft skills.

The IT students need soft skills specifically as after they complete their courses, they have knowledge of hard skills but lack in soft skills. These are the "Life Skills" which shape up an individual's persona. Possessing soft skills with hard skills gives a competitive advantage to students when applying for jobs.

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