It pays back to the company to add soft-skills to your technical employees!

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Abstract

Why should companies emphasize the importance of soft skills training? There is no question that today employees are very competent with technical skills, but the critical question is, “Will this suffice for them to be globally competitive?” The wide rivers of culture, language and environment can only be crossed with being proficient with soft skills. Also, today companies are facing intense competition from MNC’s who are offering identical services in their own backyard. The only way that companies can continue to dominate this space is by up-skilling their employees in soft skills.

Soft skills, as opposed to hard skills (such as technical skills), focuses on those elements of training that require changes in behavior and thinking. Organizations today recognize that the soft skills training of their employees play an important part in maintaining relationships with their customers and developing a successful business. Organizations that endeavor to be on the path of continuous learning will often find that upgrading the ‘soft skills’ of their workforce is a necessary part of business. It not only helps improve service but also shows the interest that an organization has in the professional development of their employees, which in turn leads to higher employee retention.

Many organizations we have worked with point out that soft skills are high in the list of requirements for global business; hence an important part of management training. They have found that soft skills training in areas such as Cultural Sensitivity, Business Etiquette and good Communication Skills (telephone etiquette, email etiquette, information gathering and listening skills) make a greater impact on clients from across the world rather than a high degree of technical skills.

A survey of IT recruitment advertisements will clearly reveal that at entry-level positions technical skills are emphasized. However, soft skills like effective communication, the ability to work in teams and strong interpersonal skills are what enable a person to move up the ladder. The world is flat and we are constantly interacting with people who come from different cultures and countries. Hence it is vital to understand the customer, not only in terms of the project delivery but also with reference to their perspective, in order to relate to them.

Key Words: Soft-skills , Success,Industries/Corporates

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**Introduction**

There are number of definitions about soft skills. And everyone gives their own way of definition about soft skills. There is yet another problem about this domain, as people call it with different names such as people skills, emotional intelligence, life skills, interpersonal skills etc., Soft skills can also be called as employability skills as it equips the students with certain skills, abilities, attributes and competencies those are essential for getting placement at the corporate world.

These are the ones that define one's approach towards work, life, problems, etc. Soft skills are people skills. The best part about mastering them is that the application of these skills is not limited to one's profession, but their scope reaches all aspects of life. Technical skills may teach one how to meet the expectations of the job, but soft skills teach one to succeed, and to exceed expectations. It is surprising that we spend our time educating almost exclusively in technical skills.

Soft skills is an evolving domain and yet to take a concrete shape. When we look at soft skills, these are the skills, traits, abilities which are essential for surviving and succeeding in the corporate world such as: emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, communication skills, motivation, leadership skills, decision making skills, negotiation skills, business etiquette, problem solving skills, conflict management, stress management etc., These are all the essential ingredients for everyone for personal, professional and social success.

In this context, it is necessary to know other side of the soft skills - hard skills. These are the skills other than domain skills - technical skills supplement the soft skills. The soft skills help in effective presentation of hard skills. Therefore both soft skills and hard skills are the two sides of the same coin and one without the other has no meaning.

The qualities and skills such as communication skills, presentation skills, team spirit, positive attitude, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, leadership skills, time management, learnability, absorbability, integrity and passion to perform are essential for all students to get employment. Then what is wrong in calling the soft skills as employability skills?

**Are technical/job-related skills enough**

Technical and job-related skills are a must, but they are NOT sufficient when it comes to progressing up the ladder.

"Soft skills are very important in business. It is essential to be technically sound, but one should also have the ability to convey the idea to the masses in the simplest possible manner."

With the boom in outsourcing taking root across industries, many professionals and subject matter experts directly deal with their clients on a regular basis.

Their approachability and people skills are what ultimately sustain the contract their employers have bagged.

"Planning is necessary but execution is also equally important. And it takes soft skills to execute any idea because it involves dealing with people directly."
6 soft skills for every hard-nosed professional

Behavioural training experts say there are several soft skills are required in these circumstances. Some of them include:

i. Interpersonal skills
ii. Team spirit
iii. Social grace
iv. Business etiquette
v. Negotiation skills
vi. Behavioural traits such as attitude, motivation and time management

Will formal training enhance your soft skills?

There is a lot of argument in the industry as to whether it is possible to enhance soft skills in a few hours of training, especially when one considers the fact that a person has lived with those traits all his life. To this, the answer is harsh but real – a professional who wants to do well in his/ her career does not really have a choice.

In the initial years of your career, your technical abilities are important to get good assignments. However, when it comes to growing in an organization, it is your personality that matters, more so in large organizations where several people with similar technical expertise will compete for a promotion.

Training on soft skills becomes all the more relevant in a country like India where the education system does not delve into personality development.

Popular soft skills courses

- Time Management
- Grammar Skills
- Business Writing
- Advanced Interpersonal Communication
- Effective Presentations
- Fundamentals of Customer Service
- Managerial Leadership
- Building Strategic Partnerships
- Business Ethics
- Business Problem Solving
- Change Management
- Continuous Improvement
- Cross Cultural Business Communication
- Effective Presentations
- E-mail Etiquette
- Fundamentals of Customer Service
- Fundamentals of Selling
- Interviewing Skills
- Negotiating
- Professional Selling over the phone
- Team Development

"Soft skills’ training is essential because we do not have it in our academic curricula. Therefore, corporate houses have to take up the task of grooming employees who are the link between the company and the external world; so that they are able to present themselves better,"

Soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Good soft skills which are in fact scarce in the highly competitive corporate world will help you stand out in a milieu of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent.
The Smyth County Industry Council, a governing body based in the US, conducted a survey recently. The result of the survey was called the Workforce Profile which found "an across-the-board unanimous profile of skills and characteristics needed to make a good employee." The people most likely to be hired for available jobs have what employers call "soft skills".

Here were some of the findings according to the workforce study:

The most common traits, mentioned by virtually every employer, were:

- Positive work ethics.
- Good attitude.
- Desire to learn and be trained.

CEOs and human resource managers said they are ready to hire workers who demonstrate a high level of "soft skills" and then train them for the specific jobs available. The ever-changing impact of technology has given hard-skills-only workers a short shelf life. The more valuable employee is one who can grow and learn as the business changes. Soft skills "are as important, if not more important, than traditional hard skills to an employer looking to hire regardless of industry or job type. This could offer a major breakthrough as educators and training providers seek to develop and cluster training courses to fit business and industry needs."

What every technical organization would rather have

- Technical and non-technical people who can communicate more comfortably and respectfully with each other, building relationships not damaging them, and who can make important decisions together quicker moving projects along faster and more cost-effectively
- Technical and non-technical professionals with the interpersonal skills that will allow them to transition to management smoothly and effectively. They will become the managers that their manager wants to promote.
- Technical people who are as competent in their interpersonal communications as they are in their own technical areas of expertise
- Managers who are more comfortable, more effective, and more capable of leading a diverse group of technical and non-technical people as a team.

In addition to process and product knowledge, employees also need training on soft skills such as leadership, communication, listening skills, and logical thinking. Soft skills are mostly taught using examples, scenarios, games, and assessment. The seemingly inscrutable veneer of success does have its foundation in arduous beginnings. In the quest for professional excellence, technical know-how or functional knowledge is no longer the only thing that matters. The importance of soft skills cannot be overemphasized in an age where so much premium is put on interactivity and communication. It thus goes without saying that if you don't have the necessary soft skills to go with your other qualifications; you might not be able to make it up the corporate ladder easily. Interpersonal skills, business etiquette, team spirit, social graces, negotiation skills and behavioural traits such as attitude, motivation and time management are the essential soft skills needed in a globalised world.
Differentiating between soft and hard skills, he said soft skills such as leadership and negotiating, listening and conflict mediating, were as important as hard skills such as education, experience and level of expertise in today’s global workforce. Positive work ethics, good attitude and the desire to learn and be trained were among the most important characteristics that an employer looks for in his or her employees, he added. Further, analytical thinking, leadership and team-building skills, the ability to communicate effectively, creativity, problem-solving skills, listening skills, diplomacy, change-readiness, giving and receiving feedback, criticism and compliments were some of the effective soft skills needed in the workforce. Adopting a “winner” attitude was the most efficient way to improve a person’s soft-skills. “You have to be a team player in the workforce, who can communicate effectively,” he said, adding “little things like making good eye contact, enunciating words properly and good body movements will develop your soft skills,” he said. “Accepting criticism and learning from them is another trait every person in the workforce should possess,” he said. Receiving and seeing off guests at home and office, being courteous to kids, women and elders in a movie hall and behaving while on a flight were some of the soft skills that every person should adopt, he said.

Every person's career cycle comprises of following three phases

1. Career choice (career options available to both entrants and experienced).

2. Career development (career progress with a blend of theory and practice).

3. Career growth (career achievements with excellence and expertise).

Identifying which career activities require soft skills is extremely important. Getting conversant with soft skills becomes all the more relevant as our education system does not delve into personality development. Importance of soft skills being a recent development, few realize it significance and various facets, while other don't want to accept it due to the complexity of its approach. To learn about these skills one needs to change and any change is a challenge. While a lot has been written and spoken on soft skills, most experts agree when it comes to implementation there has been lack of approach due to lack of clarity as to how to demonstrate soft skills by individuals. Like any other education, one needs to first know more clearly about soft skills and then implement to experience its true essence and significance. Soft skills have suddenly become a hot topic for discussion. Be it management colleges or corporate or any other sector, suddenly everyone is waking up to the importance of soft skills. But why? Because, it is difficult to survive in this competitive world without them.

As we usher into the knowledge economy with more and more people equipped with traditional degrees and certificates, it is becoming an absolutely important and critical tool that differentiates raw talent from skilled talent. Talent will no longer differentiate people in the knowledge economy. The difference between skilled talent and raw talent will be "soft skills" – the presence or absence of them.

Whether one is a gold medalist or an average performer, what distinguishes him/her at the work place is how he/she applies talent in the day-to-day activities, making things better for the organization. Here is where soft skills come into action and play a vital role.
Talking about soft skill, the most common words that come to the mind are: Leadership skills, time management, discipline, presentation skills, communication skills, etiquette, and telephone speaking skills business writing skills- the list is endless. A set of skills that influence how we interact with each other. It includes such abilities as effective communication, creativity analytical thinking, diplomacy flexibility change readiness and problem solving, leadership, team building and listening skills. The goal of soft skill training is to give the personnel an opportunity to learn and practice new patterns of behavior and in doing so to enhance human relations.

Soft skills create opportunity for the personnel in the advancement of the career. The personnel with soft skills are more empowered than others and create opportunities for themselves. Soft skills are vital as they help to grow beyond money motivation. They help in the development of professional ethics. An employee who has soft skills will show better performance, have more satisfaction and better quality of his working life. Presence of soft skills will have a direct impact on organizational total quality management, institutional effectiveness and innovation synergies.

Eight great reasons for essentiality of soft skills

1. Certification is not an end in itself. Technical skills do matter what effort you are making to develop your soft skills or non–tech abilities. The essence of education is opportunity. You need soft skills to create opportunity for yourself.

2. Soft skills help advancement in career.

3. Soft skills empower and create opportunities for personal growth.

4. Soft skills develop professional ethics.

5. Control coworker's perception as a professional and an expert in the field.


7. Soft skills that make a difference include communication, problem solving, leadership and project management.

8. Soft skills not only improve career but also offer professional growth.

Conclusion

Soft skills are on the job abilities that go beyond an individual’s job description. They include personality, character, ethics and attitudes. Soft skills have graduated from a ‘nice-to-have’ category to the ‘must-have’ category. The reason employees fail is simple: they lack the “soft skills” such as communication, assertiveness, etiquette, interview and team skills, including spoken English that would enable them to be “industry-ready”. Besides, there are thousands of people, who are not promotable or languishing in low paid jobs, as they lack the soft-skills needed to make themselves noticed at work.

According to industry estimates, the demand for “industry ready” soft skills trained graduates is around 2,00,000 yearly from IT/ITES sector – if one takes into account, the total requirement from retail malls, manufacturing, entertainment, export, Banks and Civil Services and other competitive exams, the demand for such soft skills trained professional would run into a few millions. There is clearly a crying need for Corporates and Institutions to impart soft skills training for sustainable growth.