

Gap analysis of Soft skills in the curriculum of Higher Education (A case study of Management Institutes in Karnataka)

Kulkarni Sharvari* and Kulkarni D.G.

Department of MBA, KLE Dr. M.S. Sheshgiri College of Engineering and Technology, Belgaum, Karnataka 590008, INDIA

*sharvari.klkrn@gmail.com

Abstract

In the knowledge driven world of today, the pace of change is so fast. Strategic advantage to the organizations comes only from the core competences, which are developed by the individuals working in it. Such levels of excellence can be achieved only by investing in Human Resources. Soft skills are becoming inevitable important and are becoming critical in the success of any profession. In this competitive environment, employers are complaining about the lack of pre-requisite soft skills in among the graduates, which is inhibiting them to gain excellence in employability skills. The rationale of this phenomenological study is to investigate the significance soft skills needed to be successful in future employment for the students.

The aim of this study is to comprehend, how the system of higher learning perceives the importance of soft Skills, What are the industry and employers expectations regarding soft skills required for satisfying the employment needs of employers from graduates and also to emphasize on important soft skills to be developed among graduates? Graduates seek to obtain lucrative employment opportunities and employers peruse suitable new recruits from pool of graduates to fill job offerings. The study examines the momentous and development of availability of 16 soft skills at workplace namely, 1) Communication Skills, 2) Interpersonal Skills, 3) Adaptability, 4) Leadership Skills 5) Research Skills, 6) Team Work and Collaboration Skills, 7) Behavioral Skills 8) Positive Attitude 9) Empathy 10) Accountability 11) Passion 12)Critical Observation, 13) Conflict Resolution, 14) Assertiveness, 15) Strong Work Ethic and 16) Emotional Intelligence. The study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design.

Keywords: Soft skills, curriculum, higher education.

Introduction

True education is not for a mere living, but for a fuller and meaningful life. Education is vital factor in personal and professional development. Nowadays, nobody wishes to gain knowledge to be a scholar as in the previous ages. In

fact, knowledge has become a stepping stone to land up a good paying job and to get a reputed position in the society. Because of these reasons, higher education now demands a transformation to meet the elevated desires among the graduates. The skills that employers seek for their prospective employees, can be divided into hard and soft skills³. The skills that are difficult to determine in a job interview are whether the applicant has the required soft skills for the job such as critical thinking, problem-solving, dependability, teamwork, communication, ethics and initiative. Several studies related to soft skills show that Grade Point Average (GPA) can only describe the quality of a person in the cognitive aspect and cannot indicate a person's qualifications in relation to soft skills, also called social skills⁶.

Formal qualification and technical skills are just pre-requisites for modern employees. Soft skills and personal attributes are indispensable to success. It is not enough to be academically strong; employees need to work with other cultures, communicate well and be punctual and dependable⁹. Employers are claiming that job applicants do not possess the full array of skills that make them viable employable candidates¹.

Students have shown lack of respect, poor work ethic and insubordination in internships and lacked communication skills in the interview process². These instances show the need for this study not only to see if the claim that applicants lack the employability demanded by employers is valid, but also to trace the factors causing this loss of soft skills and what can be done to ensure graduates and future job applicants is that college provides the soft skills employers are seeking¹.

Due to the great importance of soft skills, institutions have to introduce it as their add-on course. This study deals with the importance of soft skills in the curriculum of Higher Education and its role in making the student placement worthy.

Definition of Problem

Students graduated from Management Institutions from Karnataka are lacking in soft skills, creating a problem at their workplace in regards with their performance. Senior management complains about the lack of soft skills in new employees and emphasizes that knowledge alone is not enough to succeed, but that effective communication also influences success. College graduates are well equipped with

the hard skills which are required for their employability, but they are significantly lacking in soft skills, required to make them more effective employees. 59 percent of hiring managers said, soft skills are 'difficult' to find in job applicants. (White Paper, The Soft Skills Imperative, The Adecco group, 2017).

Technical skills are a part of most educational curricula, but soft skills need further emphasis in the university curricula. The business leaders in this community expressed what national leaders have also stated i.e. they are not concerned about the technical skills students are acquiring in higher education; however, they identified a problematic soft skills gap.

When Linked In surveyed 291 hiring managers in the United States, it found that 59 percent said soft skills are "difficult" to find in job applicants. The problem is serious enough that 58 percent of respondents said soft skills deficiencies in the pool of candidates are "limiting their company's productivity." In August 2016, Guy Berger, Ph.D., an economist at the company, published findings of an analysis of soft skills listed on the Linked In profiles of people who had listed a new employer between June 2014 and June 2015. His review identified communication, organization, teamwork, consistent punctuality, critical thinking, social skills, creativity, interpersonal communication, adaptability and a friendly personality as the ten soft skills most in demand among employers. (White Paper, The Soft Skills Imperative, The Adecco group, 2017).

Johnston and McGregor¹² are of the opinion that failures associated with professional services can have serious economic and human consequences and that professionals need the professional skills and attitudes involved in recognizing other perspectives and valuing diverse contributions. Similarly, Jackson¹³ recommended that higher education institutions worldwide should be held accountable if they graduate professionals who are lacking the soft skills important for productivity and innovation in the workplace.

Through this we can come to conclusion that soft skills play vital role in the effective performance of an employee. But graduates are lacking in these skills. As clearly mentioned earlier, this study aims to investigate Existing Soft Skills among graduates, industry and employers' expectations in regards with Soft skills and the Gap analysis of Soft Skills among the graduates required for effective performance at workplace.

Whitmore and Fry defined soft skills as important job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines and whose application on the job is quite generalized. Soft skills complement hard skills fulfill an important role in shaping an individuals. Hard and soft skills together constitute professional competence of an individual which allows a goal-oriented and situational accomplishment of working tasks.

Study was undertaken on use of Soft Skills referring to Project Management. This study addresses a further explanation of Soft skills, their relation to project management and highlighted differences between a transactional leader and a transformational leader.

The main focus of employers when interviewing job applicants has been to determine the applicants' technical skills. It was not necessary for employers to focus on soft skills in job interviews because students were taught such skills in school. Current employers, however, must look for applicants with these skills as well because although they believe that today's applicant pool is sufficient in technical skills, they have found that it is sorely lacking in soft skills.

Classification of Soft Skills

Communication skills: Studies have shown that different aspects of effective organizational communication such as high frequency, openness and accuracy, performance feedback and adequacy of information about organizational policies and procedures are positively related to employees' feelings of happiness in the work place and job performance. Studies show that open two-way communication contributes to happy employees who are more successful in all aspects of life.

Emotional intelligence: In 1990, the first formulation of a concept called "emotional intelligence. was a new way of thinking about the ingredients of life success. The concept, Emotional Intelligence (EI), has become widespread, ever since the publication of Daniel Goleman's best seller Emotional Intelligence. It was then that Emotional Intelligence became a recognized term. The elements of EI: being aware of our feelings and handling disruptive emotions well, empathizing with how others feel and being skillful in handling our relationships are crucial abilities for effective living.

Emotional intelligence is then defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions". This definition shows that the higher order construct of emotional intelligence is broken down into four branches. The first branch, emotional identification, perception and expression, deals with the ability to accurately perceive emotions in others' verbal and nonverbal behavior. Emotional facilitation of thought is the second branch, referring to the ability to use emotions to assist thinking and problem-solving.

Third, emotional understanding denotes the ability to analyze feelings, discriminate among emotions and think about their outcomes. Finally, emotional management deals with abilities related to maintaining or changing emotions.

Employability Skills: Definitions of employability vary greatly from a focus on graduates' abilities to adapt their and use personal and academic skills to more tangible

educational outcome. To become a competitive organization, it is important that employees gain proper knowledge and skills needed to meet the environmental changes.

Interpersonal Relations: Interpersonal communication is a basic component of the human experience. It is the “means through which relationships are initiated, negotiated, maintained and ended”.

In the last decade, there has been an increased interest in the field of self-psychology. A number of important theoretical distinctions have been introduced regarding the different facets of self. Among these new approaches to the self, one of the most promising and widely used is the self-construal approach. The basic idea of this paradigm is that there are two different types of self-construal interdependent and independent.

The notion of self-construal suggests that the majority of previous approaches to identity were predominantly based on the model of the private self, separated from social roles and relations and defined through dispositions, qualities, capabilities and goals.

Higher Education

Higher education imparts knowledge, develops the student's ability and also gives him/her a wider perspective of the world around. Higher education becomes input to the growth and development of industry and also is seen as an opportunity to participate in the development process of the individual through a flexible education mode.

Higher Education in India: Next to China and United States, India has the third largest higher education system in the world in terms of size and its diversity and largest in the world in terms of number of educational institutions. After independence, Indian higher education attained a massive growth. In the Indian system, higher (tertiary) education starts after 10+2 (i.e. ten years of primary and secondary education flowered by two years of senior secondary education). Framework of higher education in India is very complex. It includes various type of institutions like universities, colleges, institutes of national importance, polytechnics etc.

Universities are also of different types like central universities which are formed by Government of India, by an act of parliament which are responsible for arranging and distributing resources required by University Grants Commission (UGC), State universities, Deemed universities (aided and unaided) and Private universities. India has a federal set-up and the Indian constitution places education as a concurrent responsibility of both the centre and state. While the centre co-ordinates and fixed standards in higher and technical education, school education is the responsibility of State. Under the department of higher education there are

several regulatory bodies and research councils which are responsible for the higher education in India.

How to develop soft skills among graduates

As for the Chicago cubs, observers have noted that emphasizing soft skills played a key role in recruiting and developing a team that would win its first World Series championship since 1908. Soft Skills are necessary for various reasons. To communicate effectively, work in a team and to build good interpersonal skills with other team members. Soft Skills are also helpful in bringing out the leadership qualities in an individual. Soft Skills are also required to understand the cultural norms and to adopt them easily.

According to a study, exceptional personnel are distinguished by the following abilities:

- The ability to abstract business problems,
- Creativity,
- Technical and business knowledge,
- The ability to work with and lead, teams,
- Analytical and logical abilities,
- High levels of self-motivation and
- Dependability.

Graduates who are willing to work in the mentioned areas should be well trained in their Higher Educational Institutes. The challenge for educators and educational institutions is to change the curriculum to accommodate teaching and learning for this diversity of career paths.

Soft skills require a different strategy for both teaching and evaluating than other skills. There is not a single best approach for teaching soft skills, as the most appropriate one depends on the context under which the teaching is taking place, the specific goals of the program and the discipline. Soft skills cannot be studied and taught formally and rather, should be learnt and over a period of time, based on students' engagement, active learning and reflection.

Recommendations for the development of soft skills are as follows:

- Encourage students to dialog with others by outcomes that include a short presentation, short panel discussion, or in-class Question and Answer sessions.
- Students must be required to work cooperatively with others toward a common goal.
- Instructors should strive to find learning outcomes that involve teaming, leadership, presentations, interviews, or panel discussions. Teaming builds both leadership skills and an ability to listen and follow the leadership of others.

Summary

According to available literature, soft skills provide confidence, productivity and deciphers future potential in

graduates. The challenge is finding out the proper soft skills training and appropriate trainer who can impart training for Graduates.

References

1. Jaschik S., Study finds big gaps between student and employer perceptions, Retrieved June 27, 2016, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/20/study-finds-big-gaps-between-student-and-employer-perceptions> (2015)
2. Hargis K.B., Career and technical education program alignment with local workforce needs, Ed.D. dissertation, Eastern Kentucky University, Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text database, UMI No. 3488204 (2011)
3. Omar M.K., Bakar A.R. and Rashid A.M., Employability skill acquisition among Malaysian community college students, *Journal of Social Sciences*, **8(3)**, 472-478, doi:10.3844/jssp.2012.472.478 (2012)
4. Cherniss C. and Caplan D.R., Implementing emotional intelligence programs in organizations, In Cherniss C. and Goleman D., eds., *The emotionally intelligent workplace*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, 254-285 (2001)
5. Cherniss C. and Goleman D., eds., *The emotionally intelligent workplace*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass (2001)
6. Puliam M.G., Skill Employer Seek, Career Corner, Excelsior College, https://www.excelsior.edu/Excelsior_College/Publications/Skills_Employers_Seek_16.pdf, Diakses tanggal, 10 April 2015 (2008)
7. Mora Manuel et al, An IT service engineering and management framework (ITSEMF), *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering and Technology*, **2(2)**, 1-15 (2011)
8. Knapp Mark L. and Daly John A., *The Sage Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE Publications (2011)
9. Gewertz C., Soft skills in big demand, *Education Week*, **26(40)**, 25-27 (2007)
10. Klaus P., Communication breakdown, *California Job Journal*, **28**, 1-9 (2010)
11. Robles M.M., Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace, *Business Communication Quarterly*, **75(4)**, 453-465 (2012)
12. Johnston S. and McGregor H., Recognizing and supporting a scholarship of practice: Soft skills are hard! In *Creating Flexible Learning Environments*, Proceedings of the 15th Australasian Conference for the Australasian Association for Engineering Education and the 10th Australasian Women in Engineering Forum Australasian Association for Engineering Education, 68 (2004)
13. Jackson D., An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skills gap in modern graduates, *International Journal of Management Education*, **8(3)**, 29-58, doi:10.3794/ijme.83.288 (2009)
14. Barnett R., *Improving Higher Education*, Total Quality Core, Buckingham, SRHE & OU (1992)
15. Agarwal P., *Higher Education in India: The Need for Change*, ICRIER Working (2006)
16. Kaul Sanat, *Higher Education in India, seizing the opportunity*, Working paper no. 179 (2006)
17. Gallivan M.J., Truex D.P. and Kvasny L., Changing patterns in IT skill sets 1988-2003: A content analysis of classified advertising, *ACM SIGMIS Database*, **35(3)**, 64-87 (2004)
18. Lee D.M., Trauth E.M. and Farwell D., Critical skills and knowledge requirements of IS professionals: A joint academic/industry investigation, *MIS Quarterly*, **19(3)**, 313-340 (1995)
19. Wilhelm W.J., Logan J., Smith S.M. and Szul L.F., Meeting the demand, Teaching "soft" skills (2002)
20. Kechagias K., Teaching and assessing soft skills, MASS Project, September (2011)
21. Hazzan O. and Har-Shai G., Teaching computer science soft skills as soft concepts, Paper presented at the 44th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education (2013)
22. Russell J., Russell B. and Tastle W.J., Teaching soft skills in a systems development capstone class, *Information Systems Education Journal*, **3(19)**, 3-19 (2005).

(Received 25th December 2018, accepted 26th January 2019)