Roles of Soft Skills in Employability and Professional Advancement: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Globalization has brought the world closer together over time, and it has accelerated the development of workplaces. Delivering an advanced standard of workplace excellence has been crucial and mandatory. Everywhere, particularly at work, there is a high level of competition. Often large firms have argued about the survival of the fittest as inevitable, but also as the significant challenge faced. Despite the rapid change, the prevailing challenge is how to stay ahead in the competition, as well as how to sustain and retain the competition. According to studies, workers at the workplaces must learn soft skills in addition to their domain knowledge that can help them advance in their careers. Soft skills are essential for a successful career and also for social interaction. These skills are highly valued by employers looking to recruit new graduates too. The primary aim of this study was to assess how students viewed soft skills in relation to their education and employment. This paper suggests several methods for improving students' soft skills that can aid in their careers.

Disciplinary: Interdisciplinary (Human Resource Training & Development, Professional Development, Communication Skills, Positive Psychology, Career Development & Guidance).

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1 Introduction

The contemporary market ecosystem is becoming more dynamic, volatile, and competitive due to various factors. Human resources are seen as a valuable commodity by all types of organizations since they are critical to their efficiency and growth. Most organizations want to hire,

engage, and promote people who are trustworthy, resilient, and ethical, as well as those who are self-directed, eager to negotiate and improve, and have a positive perspective (Sharma, 2018). Employers typically tend to see a well-balanced set of skills in their employees. In addition to discipline-based expertise, skills are also being perceived as desirable for advancement in the workplace (Ramesh & Ramesh, 2010).

Workplaces, positive attitude, interpersonal communication, ethics, teamwork, and time management are the broader domains where soft skills play a vital role in creating long-lasting impressions. We have all worked with colleagues who walk into gossip occasionally, have little concept of dressing properly for special events, and also have a pessimistic attitude about resolving the issue. To achieve success quicker, such people use immoral methods. These are only examples of poor soft skills that are essentially seen in the workplace. These skills are essential for the development of individuals and their careers. There is no specific definition of soft skills in literature; it only has examples to define one's interpretation of soft skills. To obtain a better knowledge of soft skills, they should be recognized as interchangeable with life skills like interpersonal skills, communications skills, job skills, cultural skills, management, and employability abilities. "Whatever the name, communicating or interacting in public is nearly essential at some point in the world. Soft skills are now regarded among the most important skills and competencies, according to recent surveys. Soft skills training in the workplace has garnered considerable attention, and it's become a requirement to incorporate these skills into one's personality" (Ramesh & Ramesh, 2010).

In addition, the importance of these skills in several areas has also highlighted the highly essential and valuable diversity of soft skills in the workplace. Nowadays, there are innumerable events, training, and social gatherings where people from diverse backgrounds collaborate towards a common goal by implementing skills and concepts to the best of their abilities.

2 Literature Review

Soft skills are extremely valuable; many researchers study soft skills, say, "are essential skills of people—the non-technical, immaterial, personality-specific skills that determine the strengths of one's leading role, listener, negotiator and mediator of conflict"(Alex, 2012). Alex asserts there is a separate range of credentials called hard skills i.e. that are related to specialized skills or professional qualifications and vary significantly from soft skills. "Hard skills are more aligned with your curriculum vitae - your schooling, experience, and level of expertise" (Alex, 2012).

In other words, the technical skills gained through learning, formation, and practice on behalf of a degree are hard skills. Hard skills and soft skills, on the other hand, are not mutually exclusive. Globalization has greatly aided the changing workplace climate that necessitates soft skills; otherwise, survival and long-term viability will remain a distant dream. Therefore, the vital importance of soft skills at workplaces cannot be overlooked.

2.1 Soft Skills at Workplaces

Soft skill is recognized in the workforce, in the maintenance of interpersonal relations, also in shaping events and even in the development of effective approaches. Other representatives on the field believe that soft skills are inadequate since they hold the belief that they cannot undertake certain positions due to the varied profession. They do not realize that a lack of respect and appreciation reflects a lack of life skills in an employee, as well as a loss of motivation to improve one's temperament and work performance. It is very important to build a healthy working relationship with colleagues, customers, and other stakeholders if you want to grow academically and also professionally. The inability to get along with others might impede job advancement. Employees may be at the peak of their careers, but they may end up very much at the bottom from where they have begun if they lack essential competencies. Integrating soft knowledge in the workplace helps employees discover the strengths and weaknesses they lack and can take advantage of them to face the infinite challenges and achievements they have enjoyed during their career progression. Soft skills play a key role in influencing employees' success in their careers.

2.2 Skills for Positive Attitude

A positive working attitude recognizes the attitude of an employee to his or her job. It enables a greater degree of skill and distinguishing the employee from the job. In other words, a positive attitude is an expression that aims to achieve its individual achievements in reflection and determination. "Positive attitude is one of the key factors influencing the success of a person" (Masters & Wallace, 2011).

It is beneficial for an employer in terms of job development because the employer's positive attitude decides how dedicated and attentive an individual is to duty. Self-improvement encourages curiosity, a drive to learn, and, as a result, higher regard for work performance. This is contagious because it generates and spreads good energy across the team and company, establishing a winning mentality. While knowledge and talent are key elements for success, behavior connects both people and work and improves connectivity.

Positive thoughts start with trust in an individual. Trust strengthens capacity, increases energy, and strengths the mental capacity by developing a positive outlook. The advantages of having a good mindset at work include a plethora of advantages such as increased authority and promotion opportunities. The right mindset always makes a significant difference and fosters relationships that lead to a more positive work environment and goals. The right mindset is one that "focuses on the better, is willing to work in a team, and aspires to be an individual who can accomplish things."(Casto, 2000). A positive environment encourages strong morale and results-oriented teamwork. Both good and negative ideas share a space while one feels unbeaten and encouraged. Negativity will result in terrible feelings, with obvious negative effects

2.3 Skills for Interpersonal Communication

Good communication ability begins career development. One of the many steps towards successful careers is the ability to communicate. Without adequate communication skills,

interpersonal relationships, in particular at work, are difficult to gain, maintain or expand. Communication is the very way in which a large number of people are connected to an organization both internally and externally. All of them are linked by communication.

Studies suggest that "there is considerable evidence that it is difficult in advance to advance your career for those who lack a range of well-developed communication skills"(Ellis, 2009). Effective communication delivers signals that are free of misinformation or ambiguity, as well as transparency and accountability to the recipient. As a result, the shared message must be successfully communicated, heard, and comprehended.

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are all important aspects of communication abilities. "About 65-75 percent of all communication in nature is not verbal," (Schwartz, 2017). As a result, "Nonverbal communication is a crucial component of successful interpersonal relationships. One of the distinguishing characteristics of non-verbal communication is that it is visual rather than spoken" (Tripathy, 2017).

Researches claim that "assertive people take responsibility for expressing their opinions and make every effort to communicate successfully even when their ideas or wishes conflict with the ideas of others" (Schwartz, 2003). Communication appears to be a minor matter, but it is, as previously mentioned, a herculean task as, "Taking care of each other's communication is a huge responsibility that encompasses a variety of factors such as feelings, moods, interpersonal skills, and so on. Assertiveness ensures continuity and prevents contact breakdowns "(Tripathy, 2020).

2.4 Skills for Ethics

At a most fundamental level, recognizing ethics requires adhering to the rules of the job, which include "working hard, adhering to health and safety regulations, keeping an orderly and clean working atmosphere, and being timely and reliable" (Harwood, 2013). Maintaining a higher degree of ethics is critical for professional advancement. In certain cases, many individuals suggest ethical strategies for achieving success. Humility, honesty, dedication, trust, and mutual respect give value to professional relationships and help with important decision-making. As a result, virtues and ethics, which are closely associated with values or morality or the accuracy of events, conceptions, ideas, or principles, are at the heart of ethics (Tripathy, 2020).

Ethics makes it easier to operate in line with long-standing goals and sets professional standards for conduct that concern the well-being of society and the organization. As a consequence, adhering to ethical rules promotes productive work, encourages everyone to maintain self-control, pushes employees to remain loyal to their employers, and enhances job quality.

2.5 Skills for Teamwork

A powerful team is a business asset. Actually, "Effective teams have the ability to take up more complex tasks by providing better room for open discussions and cooperation between team members to further maximize the productivity not just of the team but of the organization as a whole" (Tripathy, 2018). Teamwork helps people by ensuring that all team members have the best

mindset, experience, and expertise achievable. The team becomes an important position at work because it is a mixed bag of diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, thoughts, and perspectives. Although many people find it difficult to integrate into a group, it is an unavoidable working circumstance. What's more difficult is that team members who "do not understand the importance of team building and fellowship" can potentially put their careers on hold (Dimartile, 2012).

2.6 Skills for Time Management

Time management is one of the most crucial soft skills for a fulfilling career and progress. There's a lot to accomplish at work, like meeting deadlines, attaining objectives, producing results, and finishing duties all within a set amount of time. To advance in one's job, one must truly seek out opportunities for improvement. Time management entails several excellent approaches for making efficient use of your time and achieving professional success. Effective time management leads to better decision-making and increased work satisfaction. Business organizations focus heavily on efficient time management capabilities to build and use processes and instruments for optimal reliability, efficiency, and productivity to apply effective time management skills and experience the highest standards of effectiveness through career development.

3 Method

The final year students of various courses like Bachelor of Technology, Bachelors in Computer Applications, Bachelors in Business Administration, Bachelor in Science, Bachelor in Arts, Law, Medical, etc. from colleges of India were randomly selected as the participants of this research. This group of students has received special attention because they need to learn and master soft skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, life skills, and management skills to advance their careers. The final semester students would certainly join the workforce after they complete their final year of study, therefore the study wanted to assess their varying levels of preparation for soft skills. Before entering the workplace, the participants need to ensure that they are thoroughly trained in terms of acquiring and implementing soft skills. The 100 responses were collected through Google Forms, with confidentiality. The research took one month to complete.

4 Result and Discussion

In terms of the critical thinking ability shown in Table 1, the average point for the majority is greater than 3.50, indicating that the participants have mastered the majority of the critical thinking skills. The average point for Facing Challenges and Farsightedness is less than 3.50; the participants must improve their capacity to discriminate between interpretations (i.e. deductive analysis), as well as explaining their unique perspective with others.

According to Table 2, the majority of the participants seem to be capable of selecting the best solution to a query, as 44 of them responded "Agree" for the questions based on analyzing problem-solving skills. The results also suggest that the majority of the participants have problem-solving abilities since the minimum score for the seven categories listed above is between 3.5-4.0, which is quite high.

Table 1: Critical Thinking Ability Skills

Critical Thinking Skills	SD	D	NTS	A	SA	Average
Logical Analysis	8	8	21	36 (33.9%)	24(50%)	3.73
Clarification	8 (0.1%)	15(12.5%)	32 (35.7%)	30(39.3%)	13(8.9%)	3.34
Reaching Conclusion	9 (1.8%)	11 (5.4%)	28(28.6%)	35(48.2%)	13(14.3%)	3.62
Reasoning Capacity	9 (1.8%)	13 (8.9%)	37(44.6%)	29(37.5%)	12(7.1%)	3.39
Deductive Analysis	9	18 (1.8%)	34(17.9%)	30(39.3%)	9(39.3%)	3.21
Understanding Others perspectives	9 (1.8%)	11 (5.4%)	29(30.4%)	34(46.4%)	17(16.1%)	3.70
Understanding other culture and language	8 (0.1%)	13 (8.9%)	30(32.1%)	33(44.6%)	16(14.3%)	3.64

SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NTS=Not Too Sure, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Table 2: Problem Solving Skills

Problem Solving Skill	SD	D	NTS	A	SA	Average
Patience	10(3.61%)	10 (3.6%)	27 (26.8%)	40(57.1%)	13(8.9%)	3.64
Solution Finding	9 (1.8%)	10 (3.6%)	21 (16.1%)	44(64.3%)	15(12.5%)	3.77
Facing Challenges	9 (1.8%)	10 (3.6%)	31 (33.9%)	36(50%)	12(7.1%)	3.46
Finding Alternatives for issues	9 (1.8%)	12 (7.1%)	28 (28.6%)	39(55.4%)	11(5.4%)	3.50
Farsightedness	11 (5.4%)	10 (3.6%)	28 (28.6%)	36(50%)	15(12.5%)	3.61
Decision Making	15 (12.5%)	26 (32.1%)	36 (42.9%)	15(12.5%)	8 (0.1%)	3.55
Empathy	9 (1.8%)	10 (1.8%)	35 (3.6%)	32(41.1%)	14(42.9%)	3.57

Table 3: Life Skills

Life Skill	SD	D	NTS	A	SA	Average
Interpersonal Communication	9 (1.8%)	9 (5.4%)	11 (10.7%)	18 (58.9%)	41(23.2%)	3.96
Teamwork	12 (7.1%)	44 (64.3%)	20 (21.4%)	16 (7.1%)	12	2.29
Learning Attitude	8 (0.1%)	12 (7.1%)	25 (30.4%)	36 (42.9%)	21(16.1%)	3.57
Innovative Ideas	8 (0.1%)	12 (7.1%)	17 (16.1%)	48 (64.3%)	21(16.1%)	3.93
Consistency	9 (1.8%)	11 (5.4%)	22 (25%)	45 (58.9%)	13 (8.9%)	3.68
Strategic Thinking	18 (1.8%)	11 (5.4%)	21 (23.2%)	36 (42.9%)	22 (25%)	3.80
Helping Attitude	8 (0.1%)	9 (1.8%)	27 (19.6%)	38 (46.4%)	26 (32.1%)	4.09

The average score for item interpersonal communication was greater than the other elements as shown in Table 3. It indicated that the majority of the participants had acquired the skill of sharing and teaching whatever they had learnt. However, the component teamwork received a low average ranking of 2.29 in Table 3. The results imply that respondents' capacity to learn in big groups and expressing their perspectives with other members of society is still lacking.

5 Analytical Discussion

Although it is becoming abundantly clear that organizations place a greater focus on interpersonal skills, it's indeed equally essential for students to understand the importance of these skill sets and should put effective efforts to inculcate them. The objective of this research was to assess how well-educated participants are in terms of critical cognition, problem-solving skills, personal development, and organizational development. The research also explores the applicability and meaning of soft skills to graduates of technology, management, and medicine. It also examines how they feel and think about their soft skills training.

Several undergraduates, according to Porter (2007), do not attribute great importance on acquiring interpersonal skills. That is likely the reason, as Rynes et al (2003) explain, business students' attitudes concerning behavioural courses with a strong focus on soft skills development are most often unfavourable since it is their resistance to enroll in these kinds of programs. Consequently, professional graduates possess a knowledge gap while entering the job market since they lack the vital soft skills needed in the workforce. According to the current empirical study, the majority of participants have developed soft skills to a degree of efficacy, and the mean value for each soft skill categorization is higher than the average. Nonetheless, the participants need to improve and acquire a few skills, especially those related to lifelong learning. Individuals' attitudes, attributes, traits, and conduct are all the demonstration of soft skills. Social interaction, conflict resolution, self-motivation, moral choice, and organizational skills are also examples of soft skills (Gupta, 2009). As a result, institutions of higher learning are under considerable pressure to improve the soft skills of their graduates.

Kumara and Sahasranam (2008) investigated the soft skills of technical Indian students using a baseline soft skills assessment questionnaire. Their research claimed that well-designed training programmes are sufficient for creativity and soft skills to be tuned, shaped, and developed. Even Addams et al (2010) have also claimed that by structuring assignments around legitimate workforce settings, the communication abilities, particularly the ability to write compelling business letters by the business graduates might be strengthened. Recognizing the value of soft skills, simulation and experimental results show that they should be incorporated into the curriculum, providing a way for students to develop soft-skills effectively (Howe, 2010; McEnrue et. Al, 2009).

The results of Table 1 also demonstrate the average scored by the majority in the sub-category of the items enlisted in critical ability skills is greater than 3.50. It is also observed that participants must improve their capacities to discriminate between interpretations and explain their unique perspectives since the scores obtained for farsightedness and handling challenges are below 3.50. Communication, leadership, persuasion, and negotiating abilities were the top four soft skills identified by students in professional development. Therefore, this study promotes that participants must enhance their ability to distinguish different interpretations (i.e. deductive analysis), as well as their ability to express their distinct voice to others.

A series of claims were used to examine students' broader views on the importance of acquiring soft skills. Since many students agreed or strongly agreed with the assertions, soft skills were viewed as crucial for professional advancement, highly wanted by employers, and playing a critical role in obtaining a suitable job (see Table 2). Similarly, 41 students considered interpersonal communication as important and 48 students regarded inventive ideas as more important, demonstrating how they perceive the role of soft skills in daily life. It also shows that soft skills are harder to master than professional knowledge and capabilities. A majority of respondents, on the other hand, disputed or strongly disagreed with the claims that soft skills cannot be improved via

practice and that these qualities are not as significant as professional knowledge and abilities. This demonstrates that respondents comprehend the importance and significance of interpersonal skills.

Table 3 shows that the average score for item interpersonal communication was higher than the other aspects. It showed that the majority of the participants had mastered the ability to teach and share what they had learned. In Table 3, however, the component teamwork obtained a low average value of 2.29. The findings suggest that respondents' ability to learn in large groups and share their viewpoints with other members of society is still limited.

The final three questions in the questionnaire yielded a number of results. The majority of respondents believed that developing and honing soft skills is essential for a successful career in the field of Information Technology. Soft skills such as strategy formulation, conflict resolution, life-long learning, and organizational development were viewed by the majority of participants as a perk that would also help them to become effective contributors in the future. They accepted that soft skills must be learned when attending higher education institutions and that soft skill components should be incorporated into the existing curriculum. Soft skills are also vital in job advancement, according to previous studies, particularly when it comes to interacting with others and responding appropriately. (Rainsbury et. al, 2002).

One of the most significant teaching endeavours is soft skill development. The attempt at teaching skills should begin at a young age (i.e. at the elementary level of education). Even prior to enrolment in a school, the development of soft skills within a child starts at home. The reach of globalization has an uncertain scope of professional security in the twenty-first century. As a result, it is critical to train, enlighten, and advise the younger or emerging generations on the relevance of these abilities during career planning, interviewing, and eventually in the workplace.

Soft skills would be extremely beneficial and supportive to lead towards a tranquil and joyful existence. As a result, educational institutions and centres should begin focusing on various approaches and strategies to help students acquire soft skills. In reality, these abilities would come in handy in every situation. To back up the points made, a recent study found that a child matures with a well-balanced and well-composed set of social, cognitive, and emotional capabilities, allowing them to tackle an endless number of obstacles in today's world. It is also believed that the combined set of talents improves the skills, eliminating disparities of all forms. Soft skills are a source of satisfaction for everyone. Almost all countries want soft skill training since it boosts their annual earnings. Individuals, on the other hand, feel free to deal with others in peace. Every human being must ascend the hierarchy of social skills, interpersonal communication, time management, etc. in order to master soft skills.

While some of the courses have introduced students to some of these soft skills, the participants believed that they still have a lot to learn and develop to be effective in their potential careers. Besides that, the response from the participants suggested that the majority of students did not obtain adequate soft skills from their universities to thrive in their careers. Despite this, it

was observed that these participants were aware of the significance of interpersonal skills and their relevance in the workplace.

6 Conclusion

This paper examines some of the various soft skills and abilities and how important they are in the progress of one's profession. While the press, corporate representatives, and political leaders frequently reflect on graduates' lack of "soft skills," this research shows that there are various degrees of preparation amongst these participants. The findings indicate an overall amount that is significantly higher than the average. Realistically, the Ministry of Higher Education is doing all possible to integrate various types of soft skills into regulated curricula at most of the higher education institutions. However, when these graduating college/university learners were polled about the incorporation of soft skills into their formal education, it was discovered that they were picky about which skills they valued. The development of soft skills helps transform adversity into further career success opportunities. While goals are difficult to accomplish at the outset, Soft skills, as outlined in the article, can be used to progressively surmount impediments that trigger a professional crisis. Anyone may appeal to the masses and progress in professional accomplishment by altering their personality and opinions about the workplace, colleagues, and circumstances. However, the only abilities soft skills limit to positive attitudes, good communication skills, strong ethics of the work, and teamwork and time management skills. This paper has analysed how important it is for the development of careers in this highly competitive world to be achieved with selected soft skills. The paper proposes ways and means for workers in the workplace to assess their need for positive thinking, communication, reliance on core values and ethics, teamwork and time management to cope with difficult individuals and situations, and ultimately to provide them with a roadmap for a good experience at the workplace. The mastery of soft skills in this very competitive world helps employees not only to distinguish themselves from the public; it also increases the wonder of relations, job performance, and career progression.

7 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding authors.

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