

Non-Technical Skills: The Need/ Demand of Present Workplace Scenario

Abstract

Skill building can be viewed as an instrument to improve the effectiveness and contribution of labor to the overall production. It is as an important ingredient to push the production possibility frontier outward and to take growth rate of the economy to a higher trajectory. Skill building could also be seen as an instrument to empower the individual and improve his/her social acceptance or value. The rapid increase of technology has contributed to increased demands on skilled workers that are not only focusing on technical skills, but also on non-technical skills. However, the lack of non-technical skills and the high dependence on technical skills is the problem that should be overcome by skilled workers in India. The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of non-technical skills, that are neglected compared to technical skills. This is highlighted by its definition and the elements in them.

Keywords: Non-Technical Skills, Non-Technical Skills Elements.

Introduction

Non-technical skills have been significantly influence education as an effect of the changing global-business environment. The need for non-technical skills is an important element in the era of globalization, liberation and technological change. Recently, most of the employers have stated that employees nowadays do not meet their expectations in today's volatile economic environment. Eventually, most employers from different industry have also highlighted the importance of non-technical skills as a required skill for the employees, in order for them to seriously compete and contribute to the current job market. These skills are required to help employees perform their tasks more effectively as globalization will result in an increase in demand for workers who possess these skills as well as additional skills such as public relations, negotiation and cognitive skills.

The term non-technical skill was first used in European Civil Aviation (1990s). Non-technical skills are the cognitive and social skills that complement technical skills, and contribute to safe and efficient task performance. In addition, non-technical skills are needed to accomplish various tasks and jobs. These skills, also known as soft skills according to Lange (2000), are not adequately addressed in institutions of higher learning. He further asserts that the advancement in technology and the social and economic changes have resulted in the workplace requiring workers with a broad set of skills which include problem solving, listening, negotiation, communication, teamwork and positive work attitudes and cooperation, which are not specific to any particular job position or workplace environment.

According to Roger (1996), non-technical skills play an important role in supporting technical skills. Employees must not only have technical expertise and experience, but also possess interpersonal communication skills, decision-making, problem solving, reading, writing and counting. These skills are deemed important because tasks could be carried out better if those skills are mastered.

Definations of Non-Technical Skill

1. Non-technical skills, also known as generic skills or life skills can be divided into two categories: functional and adaptive. According to Lange (2000), functional skills are basic skills used to apply to tasks and to solve new problems and these can go beyond one's training and past experience. Some examples of the skills are communicating, questioning, analyzing and decision-making. On the other hand, adaptive skills are skills that describe the manner in which employees conduct themselves and interact with the working environment. Some examples of these skills include group effectiveness and teamwork skills and leadership and organizational skills.



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2. According to Noor Azizi Ismail et al. (2001), non-technical skills comprise the ability to carry out specific tasks. They include initiative, group work, reading and writing abilities, computerization, problem solving, personal attitudes, ethical and professional skills, communication skills, accounting and financial skills, leadership, decision-making skill, general knowledge to execute tasks, analytical, mathematical, statistical, interpretation, project management, knowledge from other relevant disciplines, self projection, and awareness on global issues.

The Need for Non-Technical Skills

Recently, non-technical skills have been one of the employer's main concerned in the recruitment process than student's academic performance (Harvey, 2000). It is often said from the point of view from the employers simply lack the non-technical

skills required for being outstanding in the workplace. Whatever the reason, the point of the matter is, employers are looking for an all-rounded employee, instead of the traditional employee with only basic technical knowledge. Employer needs and educational responses are not matching according to the workplace environment. Employers require workers with positive personal qualities and work attitudes in addition to academic qualifications. Many studies have also revealed that employers believe that workers are deficient in the non-technical skills and educational institutions need to start putting more emphasis on providing teaching and training in non-technical skills along with vocational training. The changing requirement of employers and increase their expectation in terms of the nature of work have made nontechnical skills more important and demanding for today's work scenario.

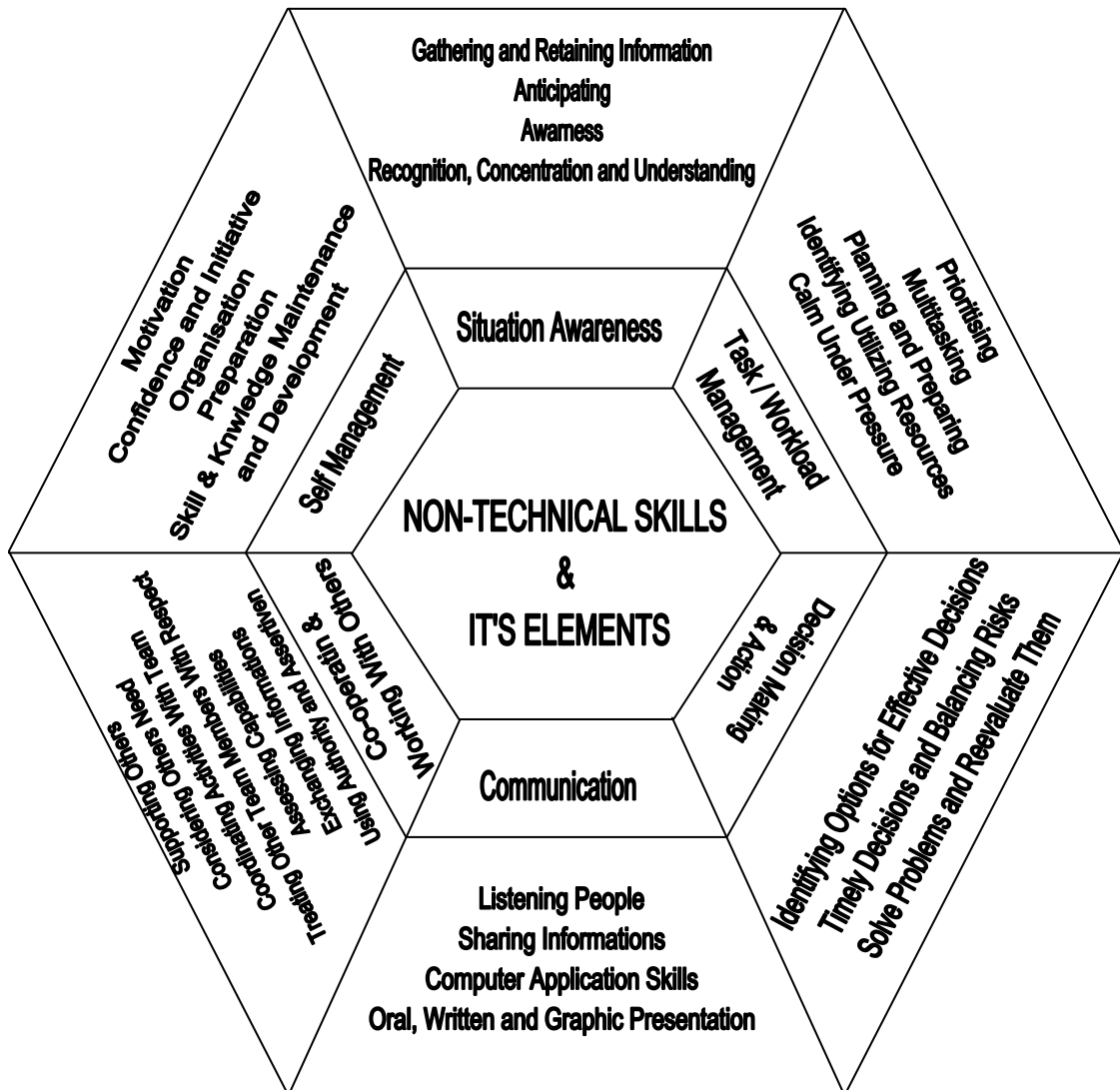


Figure showing: Non-Technical Skills & It's Elements

1. Situation Awareness

Situation awareness can be described as one's awareness about the environment at the moment of any event and the analysis of this to understand how one's actions cast impact on upcoming events. This becomes particularly important when many events are happening simultaneously. High information input with poor situational awareness may lead to poor decision making and serious consequences. In a functioning situation, a worker equipped with non-technical skills will have awareness and understanding of current events and focuses on recognizing and sharing only the relevant information. Some important situational awareness factors include:

1. Gathering and Retaining Information
2. Anticipating
3. Awareness
4. Recognition, Concentration and Understanding

2. Decision Making and Action

This is the cognitive process of choosing a specific course of action from several alternatives. Many decisions are to be made by the worker who is having this skill, provides guidance, direction and instruction to the other workers to enable successful completion of a task. He /She assimilates information from the other workers and from personal observation and use this to determine appropriate interventions. A study by Siegel (2000) found that most employees who have skills in solving problems are key factors to having competence in management. This is achieved by looking at various perspectives to add the level of understanding and awareness of the present situation. They are able to view the picture how to solve problems. Good decision making enables the management process of an organization to function efficiently. Typical decision making skill elements include:

1. Identifying Options for Effective Decisions
2. Timely Decisions and Balancing Risks
3. Solve Problems and Reevaluate Them

3. Tasks/ Workload Management

Tasks/Workload management skill is the skill of managing the amount of work required to successfully manage assigned tasks and bring them to completion. Workload implies making changes in the working conditions. The concept of workload must be examined through activity analysis, which takes into account the overall work activity seen as the result of a combination of factors present in the work situation. Clear expectations of how work will be prioritized using an agreed formula which underpins front line staff decision making. The change occurs in workplaces on a daily basis and it is the responsibility of workers to plan and prepare forms part of normal business and project. Workload management and associated workload allocation supports the pursuit of strategic priorities, and is to be linked to business, operational and workforce planning processes in addition to individual performance management processes. Effective workload management systems should have the following core elements:

1. Prioritising
2. Multitasking
3. Planning and Preparing
4. Identifying and Utilizing Resources

5. Calm Under Pressure

4. Cooperation and Working with Others/Team Working

This is one of the most important non-technical skills that contribute to successful management of critical situations. In many workplaces it is common for people to co-operate, support, collaborate or work in teams to complete a task. This quality will allow others to achieve their best. It is important to be able to work with others in a friendly and co-operative way, treating them with respect as employer's value workers who can get along with others and contribute to teamwork. It is also important to consider others' need. It is expected that people will help if something needs to be done urgently or quickly. Employers generally like workers who are willing and able to perform a range of tasks, not all of which might be stated in job descriptions. The SCANS (1991, 1992) reports, for example, list "participates as a member of a team" as an interpersonal competency. Berryman and Bailey (1992) stated that the changing workplace puts a premium on teamwork and the ability of team members to cope with unpredictable problems. This skill contains elements such as:

1. Supporting Others
2. Considering Others' Need
3. Coordinating Activities With Team
4. Treating Other Team Members With Respect
5. Assessing Capabilities
6. Exchanging Information
7. Using Authority and Assertiveness

5. Communications

Communication is one of the substantial elements in an organization. These skills are very important in an organization's economic development because except few works most of the works require a good level of communication competency. Communication involves verbal and nonverbal elements as well as the ability to use language either written or oral to get a message across. From another point of view, Lowry et.al. (1997) claim that oral and written communication skills are very important at the work place. Organizational processes such as employee relations, customer relations, public relations, negotiation, strategic planning, etc. all require communication in order to run the organization effectively. The effective elements of communication skill are as follows

1. Listening People
2. Sharing Information
3. Computer Application Skills
4. Oral, Written and Graphic Presentation

6. Self Management

It is very important non-technical skill both when working and looking for a job. Every member in the group is encouraged to understand the dynamics of the work environment because formal education does not focus on this aspect. To be succeeding, an employee must possess qualities like confidence and initiative, development of skill knowledge and its maintenance, consultation, preparation for tasks in an objective setting and work organization. Those employees who show a good combination among these skills are prime candidates for promotions. Recognition will be given to employees who are able

to motivate other workers and make use of his/her work related skills in a difficult situation. Thus the basic elements of self management skill are important in a person's career and they are needed to show the success between work group at present and in the future. Some of the self management skill elements are as follows:

1. Motivation
2. Confidence and Initiative
3. Organization
4. Preparation
5. Skill & Knowledge Maintenance and development

Another part of self-management is being able to identify ways to improve one's work performance. Improving ones performance and upgrading ones skills will increase opportunities for promotion and career progression.

Conclusion

A demand for non-technical skills has been the main aspect in the era of globalization, emancipation and technological change. The non-technical skills are essential to help employees perform their work more effectively. This paper has discussed the changing requirements of employers, in response to the need for non-technical skills in the present workplace scenario. It also presented the importance of specific non-technical skills and its elements how these enhanced employability and equipped the employees for their career. Thus we can state on the basis of above discussion that nontechnical skills are essential for preparation of an employment and equip individuals to participate effectively in a wide range of social settings, including workplaces and adult life more generally and make able to apply knowledge and skills.

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