

Soft Skills: Need of the Hour

Abstract

The present education system, with its focus on developing technical and scientific aspect of a child's personality ignores the philosophical and humanistic aspect. The result is that children live in a virtual world, unable to face the reality when the need arises. These children, with a lop-sided development of their personality are unable to fit in the highly competitive global market. The need of the hour is individuals who are all-rounders. This can be possible only if we train them in soft skills also in addition to academic and technical language. With a developed emotional intelligence, effective relationships can be built and sustained both at the professional and the personal level.

Keywords: Philosophical, Humanistic, Lop-Sided, Emotional Intelligence.

Introduction

Today's academic scenario is indeed ironic that in spite of there being no dearth of educational institutions, the students are not 'educated'; indeed ironic that in spite of the objective of these institutes being 'holistic personality development' of students, we find linear or lop-sided development in students.

The reason for this can be explained in the English scientist and novelist C.P. Snow's acclaimed speech titled 'The Two Cultures', in which he defined but at the same time regretted the separation of liberal education into a philosophical humanistic hemisphere and a technical – scientific hemisphere. Most of the students fall in the latter category i.e. technical scientific hemisphere where no emphasis is given on teaching the students 'Soft Skills'; the skills which perform an important role in shaping an individual's personality.

This is an age when relationships between individuals and organizations are getting more and more complex so it is not enough to only have an excellent IQ. Being good at number crunching and scoring high marks in subjects are not the only criteria for achieving success in professional or personal life. It is the ability to deal with one's feelings and understand the feelings of others in any given situation which helps one to complement academic intelligence/cognitive capacities (IQ) with a human understanding of issues. This ability is known as Emotional Intelligence or Soft Skills.

"Soft Skills refer to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark people to varying degrees. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job." (Wikipedia, 2007)

According to this definition, we can categorise different soft skills like Communication Skills, Problem-solving skills, Creativity, Time Management, Soft-Skill Management, Self-Esteem, Empathy, Work Ethics, Courtesy etc. into two broad categories – Interpersonal skills and Personal Traits.

Aim of the Study

This paper aims to throw light on the importance of cultivating Soft Skills in today's competitive world so as to enable an individual to perform to the best of his ability and carve a niche for himself in the world.

Major Types of Soft Skills Required for Students

Soft skills provide students with a strong conceptual and practical framework in order to build, develop and manage teams. They play an important role in the overall personality development of the students; thereby enhancing their career prospects.

The most important and the first Soft Skill is Communication and Interpersonal skills. Students these days lack this basic skill; as a result are unable to ask questions, listen actively and maintain eye contact. The current prevalence of electronic devices has connected young individuals to one another, but at the same time has also lessened their ability to communicate face to face or via telephone.



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Innovation The Research Concept

The minimum requirement for a student should be ample proficiency in spoken and written language, a certain amount of self – esteem that is reflected in conversational skills and body language; adequate discussion skills. He should be adept in good presentation skills in order to be able to market oneself and one's ideas. Communication skills are not only necessary for a person's professional career, but also contribute to one's so-called social competence. Also, these skills are a pre-requisite for a range of other soft skills like moderating discussions or conflict management.

Critical and structured thinking is the next skill required to develop problem solving abilities. In today's information society, it is very important to critically filter the endless stream of incoming data; analyse it and make informed decisions based on it. Analytical skills also form the base for finding solutions to any problem. These are of equal usefulness in a person's professional and private life.

Students should also be Creative. Creativity results in "thinking out of the box" which means that the given conventional rules and restrictions are left aside in order to find innovative approaches to problem solving. Brainstorming and mind mapping are well known applications of creativity in the business world.

Collaboration is another skill required for a student as it is imperative for students to function efficiently and appropriately in groups, collaborate on projects and accept constructive criticism when working with others.

Leadership skills are also important and should be demonstrated when necessary. While it is important to be able to function in a group, a student should have the ability to assume the lead when the situation calls for it.

Soft Skills help to fine-tune the student's attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, eagerness to learn, goal orientation, futuristic thinking and various skill sets of communication, manners and etiquette so that they can be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly. Soft skills or Emotional Intelligence skills strengthen them from within. These skills empower them to understand who they are and how best they can come across as competent individuals and prove their mettle in any given situation.

A major reason for having soft skills is today's job-market, which in many fields is becoming ever increasingly competitive. To be successful in this tough environment, candidates for jobs have to bring along a 'competitive edge' that distinguishes them from other candidates with similar qualifications and this is found in bringing along additional knowledge and skills, added up by convincing personal traits and habits.

Employers prefer to employ those candidates who will be productive from a very early stage on. The success story of such people continues because of the fact that employers prefer to promote staff members with superior soft skills. Good hard skills are not necessarily enough for anyone to be a first choice when it comes to promotion.

Therefore, the blend of both skills is essential for personal, professional and social success.

Students should therefore, make an effort, cross an extra mile in order to be proficient in Soft Skills. One way is enrolling for formal training, eg. Taking evening classes on Rhetoric, languages, presentation skills, conflict or cultural management. This is a well – proven concept with the advantage of having some kind of certificate at the end of the course, which might come in handy for job applications.

The other way of acquiring soft-skills is self – training, usually based on books. Changing of one's personality traits often requires long-term practice and therefore self-training is more useful to change oneself so as to be accommodating. Additionally, another method of self training that has become very popular is electronic learning, usually abbreviated to e-learning.

Frequent socialising with friends, colleagues, and other member of society is another way of self – training one's soft skills. In this way, we can improve our small talk capabilities and also a lot more soft skills especially related to communication skills can be practiced while chatting and discussing with others in an informal manner eg. Language proficiency in general, listening, discussing, etiquette, self-esteem or body language.

At education institutions, the teaching methodology should be changed towards more student-centric learning. Such a shift goes hand in hand with embedding soft skills into the teaching of hard skills. In other words, students participating in a lecture with the aim of learning a hard skill will inevitably and unconsciously practice a range of soft skills. This would be an ideal way of teaching.

Soft skills training includes lectures, projects, role plays, quizzes and various other participatory sessions. The emphasis is on learning by doing. As the training should be experiential and highly interactive, the students will imbibe the skills and attributes in a gradual and subtle way and also internalise them over a period of time. Internalization ensures that the skills and attributes become part of the student's nature, making them more self-assured and confident.

As a German proverb states: "Self-recognition is the first step towards improvement"

This holds true in the ambit of soft – skills too which should be acquired beyond academic or technical knowledge. As soon as a deficit is identified in this area, one should start working on its elimination and there are numerous ways of rectifying such a deficiency.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that during the last decades in society the perceived importance of soft skills has increased significantly, students should try to master these skills so as to be matured personalities with a well balanced, rounded off education. The ability to be charming, to be genuinely likeable and pleasant person is likely to open more doors than any other quality both at social and professional level. If future managers know how to

deal with people at the emotional level (peers, subordinates, clients etc) through emotional intelligence, they can build and sustain effective relationships that will result in mutual gain.

Hence, soft skills fulfill an important role in shaping an individual's personality and are very important; more so for a student as his future depends on the integration of soft skills with his hard skills.

References

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