

SOFT SKILLS - DIFFERENT ASPECTS AND IMPORTANCE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *In this present 21st century competitive world, getting success depends on various factors and skills, apart from traditional learning. Inculcating skills like – Communication, Team work, Time Management, Work ethics – not only gives an advantage, but has become a pre-requisite for a successful professional career. These skills are essential personal skills and social capabilities people need to be able to perform most jobs. This paper focuses on soft skills and its different aspects and how it becomes an essential criterion for career development.*

Key words: *Career Development, Communication, Ethics, Soft Skills, Success, Team Work, Time Management,*

1. INTRODUCTION

To lead life successfully, both in personal and professional space, we need to learn, practice and utilize certain skills, specially soft skills. It is difficult to provide a concrete definition of soft skills. Rather, a list of examples and their importance will help the readers frame their own interpretation. We need to first accept the fact that – soft skills are commonly used interchangeably with life skills, people skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, workplace skills, cultural skills, management skills and employability skills. [1] Soft skills are those skills which enable people to adjust in their environment, work well with others, perform well and achieve their goals. According to Dr. K. Alex, “Soft skills are essentially people skills – the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills that determine one’s strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator, and conflict mediator” [2].

“Soft Skills get little respect, but will make or break your career.”

Peggy Klaus

From the above quote itself, the importance of soft skills is easily surmised, specially in the professional field. People often neglect and fail to perceive the value attached to these skills. Soft skills are those skills that are absolutely essential for success. These skills are more related to emotion, insight and psyche and attractive to employers.

Soft skills help us to form relationship with people, maintain proper bonding, create trust and reliability. Wikipedia interestingly defines Soft Skills as ‘common skills’ or ‘core skills’ and points out that these are desirable in all professions. Soft skills are the combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence and personality traits that make it easy to get along and work harmoniously with other people. [3]



Figure 1: *Importance of Soft Skills*

[Courtesy: <https://skillup.tech/how-organizations-are-using-soft-skills-to-drive-profit/>]

2. EXAMPLES AND CLASSIFICATION OF SOFT SKILLS

The term soft skills cover a wide range of skill set. Some desirable and necessary soft skills are – i) Interpersonal skills; ii) Adaptability; iii) Team working; iv) Communication skills; v) Critical Thinking; vi) Time Management; vii) Accountability; viii) Stress Management; ix) Positive Attitude; x) Problem Solving etc.

Soft Skills can be classified into two broad categories: [4]

- Personal Traits
- Interpersonal Traits

Personal Traits include the following:

- a) Time Management;
- b) Responsibility;
- c) Self-confidence and courage;
- d) Attitude;
- e) Ethics, Integrity, principles, and values;
- f) Consistency and sincerity

Interpersonal traits include the following:

- a) Interpersonal skills and Teamwork;
- b) Leadership Ability;
- c) Communication Skill;
- d) Empathy
- e) Problem Solving Skill

In a survey conducted in the second quarter of 2011 in four universities of Singapore regarding the skills considered as soft skills, a total of 188 students participated. The overseas students were mainly from – China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Thailand. The students were asked to categorize soft skills. [5]

Table: 1 Skills considered as soft skills by the respondents

| Ranking | Soft Skills | Frequency [n=188] |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Communication Skills | 147 |
| 2 | Leadership Skills | 118 |
| 3 | Persuasion Skills | 112 |
| 4 | Negotiation Skills | 107 |
| 5 | Conflict Management | 91 |
| 6 | Time Management | 74 |
| 7 | Problem Solving | 71 |
| 8 | Teamwork Spirit | 70 |
| 9 | Creative Problem Solving | 70 |
| 10 | Personal Effectiveness | 62 |
| 11 | Strategic Thinking | 61 |
| 12 | Positive Work Attitude | 54 |
| 13 | Willingness to learn | 48 |
| 14 | Passion Towards work | 42 |

3. THE SOFT SKILLS GAP

Many organizations often find that their employees do not have the proper skills to perform their roles effectively. Skills gap refers to the difference between the skills required for a job and the employees actually possess. When the workforce has lots of technical skills but an absence of soft skills, then it is a soft skills gap. [6]

- When you have lots of employees and managers but no leaders – that’s a soft skills gap.
- If an agent is good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, it is because of soft skills gap.
- If the customers are complaining against certain employees of an organization, then they need an attitude adjustment.
- When the employers find that the employees do not hold themselves accountable for the downfall of the company, chances are that they have soft skills gap.

If you are unable to capitalize on the vast knowledge, experience and proficiency within your team, then you should focus on communication and interpersonal skills.

4. HARD SKILLS VS SOFT SKILLS

It is important to understand the difference between soft skills and hard skills for proper utilization of both the skill set. Hard skills are basically learned abilities acquired and enhanced through practice, education and repetition. Hard skills are teachable abilities or skill sets that are easily measurable. These are basically educational qualifications, technical abilities, experience and level of expertise – that appear on one’s resume/C.V. and fit for job. Hard Skills refer to the ability and knowledge that an individual needs in order to do their job.

Soft Skills, on the other hand, are the interpersonal skills that people need in order to do well in their jobs. Hard Skills are basically technical abilities that are earned through education, training and practice in the name of a degree. Hard skills help one to get a job, but soft skills help to progress in his career. Hard skills can be quantified and advanced. One can learn advanced mathematics or improve his writing skills. Soft skills help us to use hard skills to the full extent.

But it should be noted that both hard skills and soft skills are necessary for a person's life. They are different but at the same time complimentary to each other.

5. SOFT SKILLS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Soft skills play a central role in one's career. From getting prepared for the job interviews and facing the interviewers, soft skills play a significant role in subsequent career development. Soft skills like – communication, negotiation skills, positive attitude, problem solving, leadership skill, body language, work ethics and emotional intelligence help accelerate career growth. Infact, one's personality is defined by how he utilizes his soft skills in both personal and professional life. Skills like adaptability and critical thinking are crucial to the path of career development.

We face a lot of problems, difficulties, encounter roadblocks, disappointing and frustrating situations. If we could apply soft skills properly, we can overcome these crisis situations.

A recent research report by iCIMS finds that – “94 percent of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership position than an employee with more years of experience but weaker soft skills.” [7] Relevant soft skills in professional sphere, directly affects performance and productivity, and in turn, impacts in promotion and career enhancement.

6. CONCLUSION

Soft skills help us to lead our personal life in a positive manner and initiates in accelerating our career progress. On the other hand, lack of these skills can restrict our ability or potential and even lead to career downfall. As soft skills are not a part of traditional learning, the importance of soft skills is often undervalued and there is less training opportunity available. If these skills are included in the curriculum, rather than as a separate training course, then it would be beneficial for the students and budding professionals.

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