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## ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

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### Abstract

*Having Effective soft skills are extremely essential for the successful career of present engineering students. Frankly speaking, command over interpersonal and soft skills are equally essential for every engineering student in today's LPG world. (In the present globalization scenario, most of the MNC's are looking for a right and suitable candidate with sound knowledge in soft skills in addition to the technical) skills. This present paper tries to focus on why enhancing soft skills for engineering students are extremely important and also a few suggestions that are highly beneficial in improving soft skills of engineering students.*

**Keywords:** *need of soft skills, personality development, skills linkage, reason and remedies.*

### Introduction

The success of an engineering student depends on soft skills in today's high speed world. The success of Indian technologists in the last one decade is attributed to the fruitful mix of their strong knowledge in the core technology and soft skills. At the same time, thousand are losing job opportunities owing to the lack of the same said skills. According to aspiring minds (2016) survey reveals that 67% of Indian engineering students are poor in soft skills and communication skills and 97% of students are not fluent in English speaking skills. The engineering students of all the streams should bear one thing clearly in their minds i. e. having required hard skills are not only adequate for their upcoming career but also command over soft skills are utmost important and very much desirable.

### Why are engineering Students Poor in Soft Skills?

After studying the economic depression that occurred in America off late, it had been observed that Indian students required bettering their communication skills, team work, knowledge (keeping up-to-date), leadership skills and peoples' skills in order to be able to compete in the world market. Hence when there is a crisis in job market, the Indian employee is expected to face more problem than those from the developed nations. Therefore, it is asserted that India did not face shortage of quantity, but that of quality. Some other key reasons for this kind of phenomena are as follows:

**1. Outdated curriculum:** India is a very diverse land and so is its education system. It has an education system

with multiple structural problems. Students are ignorant of their own ability and are unaware of subject applicability in real market. The present learning system till the undergraduate level is hugely lacking because it is not oriented towards attracting students to the subject; instead we focus on the learn-by-rote system where students can score high marks yet not know anything about the subject.

**2. Lack of application:** Our education system does not foster inquisitiveness and research orientation that are the key elements that lead to innovation. Those students interested in research leave India for more promising research opportunities abroad. Absence of a research-focused education system has left Indian graduates with skills but without the ability to think out of the box and be more employable.

**3. Societal pressure:** Not all students who become engineer do so by choice. Most are pushed by the families into choosing engineering because of the lure of a better, more prestigious professional life. This has resulted in many students without the aptitude or the will to become part of the engineering workforce and hence also irrelevant to industry.

**4. Poor soft skills:** ATIME magazine article by Martha C. White "The Real Reason New College Grads Can't Get Hired" cited a survey staffing Adecco that "44% of respondents cited soft skills, such as communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration, as the area with the biggest gap. Only half as many say a lack of technical skills is the pain point". It is, therefore, imperative that developing soft skills is an absolute must to be part of the global workforce, where interaction with people from

different cultural backgrounds and nationalities is a given. Soft skills if not given enough importance could become India's biggest drawback in terms of employability.

**5. Lack of industry exposure:** Students in India rarely work as interns in industries related to their subject of choice (or family pressure) either during their term or during vacations, unless dictated by the course itself. So all the experience a "skilled student" gains is always only on the job. This had led to, as CV Raman once pointed out in a radio talk show, that "there is existing lack of coordination between India's real needs and her educational activities". What a student learns within the four walls of the class room and what he or she implements after getting job are often vastly different.

Although a common trend in many progressive countries, gap year experience is something Indian students do not indulge in. The three top responses of gap-year students in a recent study in the United States revealed that a gap year helped students

1. Make better sense of themselves and what was important to them,
2. Have a better understanding of other countries, people, cultures and ways of living and
3. Gain additional skills and knowledge that contributed to their career or academic major.

According to Reva Dandage, co-founder of Swaraj University, Udaipur, "even though a gap year may seem like a period when you do 'nothing,' eventually, this breather turns out to be the space for making perfect decisions in terms of life and career. It's like discovering your true self". And if Indian students do take a gap, it is usually to prepare for some competitive exam or the other. Albeit a bit late, the trend is beginning to gain popularity only now in India, but it is yet to reach a level where it is imperative for students to take gap years.

### Why are Soft Skills Important for engineering Students?

In their book *The Unwritten Laws of Engineering*, W. J. King and James G. Skakoon (2008), which discusses about professional and personal considerations, the authors say that "a number of empirical studies of on-the-job excellence have clearly and repeatedly established that emotional competencies— communication, interpersonal skills, self-control, motivation, pride in accomplishments, adaptability, integrity, and so on—are much more important for superior job performance than are cognitive and technical abilities." Soft skills such as self-management, being proactive, assertiveness, keeping

commitments, relating to supervisor, keeping records, being clear and concise in documentation, and professional ethics have been listed out as the best skills ever possessed by an engineering student. Recent demands of proliferating globalisation are proving that the measuring for technical know-how towards total quality has reduced, thus paving way for newer skills. While traditional soft-skills continue to be relevant, newer skills like adjustability, broadness, problem solving, crisis management, communication skills, self-learning and information discovery, empathy and team work, motivation, attitude and a spirit of enthusiasm are emerging as necessity for modern students. Table 1, presented by Engineering Services Forum by NASSCOM (2008), shows the relation between soft skills and the business paradigms.

**Table 1: Services-Skills Linkage**

Business Paradigms in Engineering Services	Soft Skills Demanded by These Paradigms
Project	Management team
Work knowledge management	Written English Writing skills
Integrated product (IPT) Concurrent engineering	Spoken English Verbal communication
Quality systems and processes	Mindset, Attitude Attention to detail Assertiveness Integrity
Global project teams processes	Etiquette Cultural sensitivity
Rapid changes in business and technology	Stress (self) management
Innovation/productivity improvement	Open inquisitive mind Creativity

### How to Master Soft Skills?

Employers today emphasise a lot on soft skills because they understand that to get things done and achieve company goals, they ought to have make the right hires. People with good personal attributes and excellent interpersonal skills are necessary and invaluable to business. Soft skills play a vital role in professional success; they help one excel in the workplace. Their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge.

Because a lot of the soft skills can be learnt, companies ensure that their employees have the requisite soft skills for the jobs they perform. Soft skills can be developed and improved through continual training, teaching, insightful reading, observation and practice.

**Learning through teaching:** Three common methods for creating opportunities to soft skills through experience are:

- *Interactive teaching:* Trainers facilitate exercises that provide opportunities for experience, practice, emphasis, and introspection.
- *Experiential teaching:* A coach in a workplace setting teaches soft skills experientially. The coach guides employees during on-the-job work experience, internships, and work-study programmes, teaching them both technical and soft skills as these occur in the workplace 2.
- *Classroom teaching:* A classroom setting is altered to simulate the workplace.

**Experiential learning:** Experiential learning is self-learning. It is the best kind of learning. Knowing some theoretical things and implementing them correctly at the right time and place helps shape one's personality. Here are some practical tips.

**Change your mindset:** Although soft skills sound inconsequential, it is quite evident that they have a lot of significance in the workplace. So even if you grew up believing that only "soft people" need "soft" skills, you need to leave that belief behind when you enter the workplace. Some people think that soft skills are useful only in companies. You need to change your attitude here. Though "soft skills" seems to be a new word, actually it is a lifestyle. It is the way of life. The way you describe yourself to others in a positive way is soft skill.

**Know your personality strengths and weaknesses:** How you interact with others is driven by your personality type, so understanding your personality type can help you narrow the focus to areas you can leverage or improve.

**Ask for feedback from your team:** Those around you often have excellent insight into your interpersonal skills. Ask around for inputs on your actions. Not only will this win respect from peers, it will also show that you value their opinions and want to improve.

*Criticism is the only known antidote to error.* --David Brin

**Have your own mechanism:** You cannot always anticipate everything. If you can learn to handle yourself well and take care of yourself enough to weather all that life hands you, you will also have learnt to make lemonade when life throws lemons at you. So the secret lies not in finding yourself but creating yourself and building on your best.

## Personality Development and Soft Skills

**Personality development has become a modern "culture":** Personality development has a lot to do with soft skills. As these are intertwined, many corporate trainers and institutes are attracting students with different packages. Personality development packages based on various philosophical tenets are luring the student community. Humanism, naturalism, psychology, theory of relativity, scientific management, spiritualism and materialism, all have their roles in propagating various views on personality development.

Positive thinking, Yoga, Meditation, Gen yoga, pyramid, astrology, psychotherapy, hypnotism, N. L. P. , Astropsychology, change management, stress management, naturopathy, reflex therapy, Pranic healing, Art of Living, Osho Yoga, and Swastha Bharat, etc. are all methods of personality development.

**Enquiry of the personality development:** The modern personality development training wherever is taught, has forgotten the basic tenets of logic of personality and its development. The scientific theories which propose various packages for the development of human personality should follow the following order in order to get real meaning in its achievement. For any personality development training to be successful, the following must be kept in mind:

- Everyone has personality.
- Every personality has potentiality.
- Every personality is different in its existence and nature.
- Man's personality has been distorted/developed by hereditary or environment.
- Personality develops by the will power rooted from strong and logical belief of oneself.
- What is possible for an individual under particular conditions is possible for all under the same conditions.

Practical benefit to the self and society is the ultimate parameter for real success and satisfaction

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