

RELEVANCE OF SOFT SKILLS AT WORKPLACE: A STUDY ON SELECTED SOFT SKILLS TO ENHANCE CAREER PERSPECTIVES

Mitashree Tripathy

Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities
Orissa Engineering College, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Abstract

The world is coming closer and workplaces are rapidly progressing. The call for delivering higher degree of workplace excellence has been absolutely mandatory. Thanks to globalization which has executed a speed up competition everywhere especially at workplaces. Survival of the fittest has become not only crucial but also the key requirement today by many business organizations. At this expository point the question arises is how to walk paralleling the swift development and also how to stay ahead of competition to not only survive but also continue to survive at workplaces. Studies claim that employees at work places ought to possess a certain skill set which are way different from hard skills but they either construct or destruct a career. This paper studies the need and importance of soft skills especially at workplaces and also studies in details selected soft skills like positive attitude, communication skills, maintaining work ethics and teamwork abilities to be exceedingly indispensable in order to augment career perspectives.

Keywords: Soft skills, Communication skills, Positive attitude, Team work, Strong Work ethics

Introduction

Soft skills are considered to be one of the most emerging studies in the recent decades. Soft skills are groups of personality traits including life skills, people skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, workplace skills, social and emotional intelligence and countless emotions which directly or indirectly affect our behavior in developing or butchering relationships. The relevance of soft skills is not restricted to personal lives only. Studies detect that soft skills and their significance are exceptionally prerequisite chiefly in the domain of workplaces.

The origin of soft skills goes to hundred years back in 1918 when Charles Riborg Mann in a bulletin of *A study of Engineering Education* issued by the representatives of Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching mentioned about the first meeting of the Joint Committee of the National Engineering Studies. In the meeting, many engineers were interrogated pertaining to those components which are considered potential in ascertaining success in engineering and building engineering profession. An analysis followed that "These interviews, together with a study of the methods of rating college graduates in several large manufacturing companies, indicated that personal qualities such as common sense, integrity, resourcefulness, initiative, tact, thoroughness, accuracy, efficiency, and understanding of men are universally recognized as being no less necessary to a professional engineer than are technical knowledge and skill". (Mann 106).

Interestingly, the study of soft skills do not restrict to engineering field only. Researchers found that there is not a single domain of workplaces across the globe where the

relevance of soft skills is not cited. From management to IT, from education to administration, from hospitality to trading the application of soft skills at workplaces has gained enough attention and the need to inculcate these skills into one's personality has become a necessity. Ramesh asserts "Whether you work in the IT industry or manufacturing industry, whether you work in a family business or a multinational corporation, soft skills are those skills that are absolutely essential for success" (Ramesh, 2010, p.3). Many authors have penned down the significance of soft skills in various areas and have also pointed out different kinds of soft skills highly required and beneficial at workplaces. Workplaces are large platforms where a number of people work together for a common purpose. Face to face meetings, trainings, business dealings, and many more depend on how well an individual smoothly conducts communication process by executing ideas and information in the best possible manner.

Alex defines "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" (Alex, 2009, p.3). Alex further explains about hard skills which are way different than soft skills. He clarifies hard skills "are more along the lines of what might appear on one's resume- your education, experience and level of expertise" (p.3). In other words hard skills are the technical abilities that are earned through education, training, and practice. However, it is also true that since the growing importance of soft skills are largely accepted, "hard skills alone might not be sufficient in order to survive successfully" (Bhatnagar and

Bhatnagar, 2011, p.2). But the fact that both hard skills and soft skills complement each other is not false.

Rao determines soft skills to be healthy promoter of communication and performance. Rao is of the view that “soft skills minimize the gap across various departments in an organization thus promoting effective communication and performance. Soft skills close the barriers and build the bridges among the people at workplace. All these things ultimately lead to better productivity and performance” (Rao, 2010, p. 7-8). The current scenario reveals the changing environment at workplaces which critically demand soft skills or else achieving goals and staying ahead of competition would remain far from reality.

Francis in his book *Communication* denotes the importance of soft skills at workplace by clarifying that “soft skills not only help in improving the flair for communication inculcating team spirit, but also enhancing leadership qualities, time management, group discussions and interpersonal skills. Apart from these professionals trained in soft skills are well equipped to face interviews, participate in group discussions and deal effectively with placement consultants” (Francis, 2012. p.3)

The business guide of *Simplifiable* recognizes around 87 soft skills distributed under various other sub skills like leadership, communication, personal skills and interpersonal skills and many more. However, this paper deals with the study of selected soft skills which are critical and must have by the employees at workplaces.

Soft Skills at Workplaces

Although the relevance of soft skills is on familiar terms with everyday life, in preserving interpersonal relationships, in shaping activities and building strategies for success, its insinuation is predominantly found at work places. Competition is progressively increasing across workplaces worldwide. A fair need to be fit, flexible and existing is highly imperative. Indoctrinating soft skills at work place help deal with uncountable challenges and accomplish achievements as they offer essential factors to influence success of the employees in specific and organization in general. Studies conducted by ‘National Business Survey’ from the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counseling (CERIC) on 500 employers based on the requirement of soft skills at workplaces suggest a number of soft skills on basis of occupation and profession and conclude that positive attitude, communication skills, team work skills and strong work ethics are few among many that employers consider important (<https://careers.workopolis.com/advice/survey-the-most-sought-after-skills-that-employers-are-having->

difficulty-finding/). This paper offers in details the description of the aspects of the soft skills and their significance at workplace.

Positive Attitude

Positive attitude is the right form of expression that reflects and determines how an employee does his/her work and how others comprehend the kind of employee one is. Positive attitude is executed by positive thinking. At work places both talent and knowledge are vital to succeed. However, its positive thinking that interlinks both the essential factors and enriches confidence in self. Fritz in his book *The power of a Positive Attitude: Discovering the key to Success* writes what it takes to begin with positive attitude which at the initial stage “begins with having confidence in oneself. Confidence reinforces ability, doubles energy, buttresses mental faculties, and increases power” (Fritz, 2008, p. viii).

Displaying positive attitude at workplace has umpteen benefits of uplifting possibilities for promotion or better job role. Staying happy and positive is a choice which assists in coping up with stressful situations. While positive attitude is contagious its makes everyone around feel easy, light and regulated to carry out works and projects in a better way. Optimistic attitude towards each other at workplace generates good relationships which further fosters better work atmosphere and achieving goals become easier. It engages the mind and simultaneously the work with the same feeling. Working with high positive spirited environment creates morale driven results and situations. In the words of Peale “feelings of confidence depend upon the type of thoughts that habitually occupy your mind. Think defeat and you are bound to feel defeated. But practice thinking confident thoughts, makes it a dominating habit, and you will develop such a strong sense of capacity that regardless of what difficulties arise you will be able to overcome them” (Peale, 2016, p. 33-34). Hence it is up to self who controls thought process and attitude.

Communication Skills

Workplaces exist because of communication and it involves a long chain of people attached like subordinates, superiors, co workers, outside parties and other associated people with an organization. Communication binds them all. A good communication includes clear and correct message delivered to the recipient without any distortion or confusion. Hence, it is required that the message conveyed must be effectively spoken and appropriately heard and understood. Not just speaking and listening but

also reading and writing too are essential components of communication skills.

In the book *Effective Communication for Human Resource Development* "Communication fosters motivation by clarifying to employees what is to be done, how well they are doing and what can be done to improve performance if it is sub-par. The goals and reinforcement of desired behavior all stimulate motivation and require communication" (Vanita, 2003, p. 17). Communication is the only process to express and facilitate proper decision making to evaluate and identify alternative choices. Effective communication hence, is an art and hence ought to be put into practice at workplaces for fine results and accomplishments of goals. Effective communication tends to eradicate error in communication, provides superior bonding among everyone at workplace and resolves conflicts. Studies suggest that more than encoding, decoding the right message is of prime importance to continue with the communication process.

Interestingly, communication can also takes place without words, better understood as non verbal communication. "About 65 to 75 percent of all communication is nonverbal in nature, says Susanne Jones, associate professor of communication studies at the University of Minnesota (<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/nonverbal-communication-workplace-interactions-844.html>). Non verbal communication like using correct body posture, gesture and facial expressions while speaking or not speaking becomes predominantly important during communication especially at workplaces. For example, if someone tends to not make eye contact or maintains physical distance, an employee may understand that the coworker does not like him/her much. Hence, this body language suggests ignorance. However, it may not be true. The chance of the co worker being introvert or shy is also possible but in this case it is highly misjudged. The voice or the tone an employee uses can suggest greatly on his/her personality. Rough tone even tough not intending to sounds harsh and concludes that the person is rude. Deep voice suggests dominance and so on.

Maintaining Strong work Ethics

The foundation of each workplace is deeply rooted to ethics and values that guide the ethical behavior of all employees. The actions and of the employees in a workplace affects not only to self but also to coworkers. Much of the decisions at workplaces involve strict guidelines which are meant for the safety of the employees and the organization as a whole. Being dishonest, using

unethical principles destabilize own integrity, put at risk hard earned trust, and thus jeopardize valuable relationships. Workplaces are large platforms including different parties from different categories, hence it becomes utmost important to attach ethics in the guidelines of the workplace.

Ethics are a cluster of rules that explain regarding certain codes of conduct accepted across the society. The concepts of ethics mostly include truthfulness, integrity, trustworthiness, honesty and fairness and many more. Sims in his book *Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility: Why Giants Fall* describe of what ethical behavior is supporting with examples of few unethical questions and leaving it up to the readers whether certain situation is ethical or unethical. Most of the examples he suggests are related to workplaces. Sims writes "Ethical behavior is that which is accepted as morally good and right as opposed to bad or wrong in a particular setting. Is it ethical, for example, to pay a bribe to obtain a business contract in a foreign country? Is it ethical to allow your company to withhold information that might discourage a job candidate from joining your organization? Is it ethical to ask someone to take a job you know will not be good for their career progress? Is it ethical to do personal business on company's time? (Sims, 2003, p.13).

The inevitability of ethics at workplaces acts as professional standards for behavior concerned with the welfare of the society. Hence, adhering to ethical codes disenchant costumers, improve quality of work and wallop a balance between the ends and the means to obtain them. A workplace culture largely depends on ascertaining core values and moving ahead to work towards a cooperative and respected culture. Schwartz defines corporate culture "as representing a slice or subset o the organization's broader culture and is maintained through an interplay and alignment of formal organizational systems and informal organizational systems. In terms of how an ethical corporate culture can lead to expected ethical behavior, employees can act consistently in accordance with the firm's ethical norms (...)" (Schwartz, 2017, p. 192).

Team Work

Team work is an important working style at various workplaces. A general difference between a team and group is while team is group of people collaboratively putting efforts for one purpose or goal; a group is simply a bunch of people with no common purpose in mind or any goal to achieve. A team becomes an important place in a workplace as it contains people from varying cultural

backgrounds and differing ideas and experiences to suggest the best of opinions for constructive and productive consequences. The idea of each individual within a team and information is generated and inspired after a positive and healthy discussion of the team members. Not only this but also each individual holds responsibility to do his/her work done and also helps other getting the work done. Avery clearly manifest that team work is not a group skill but the responsibility of each individual. The author asserts "Recognize that you are not a passive recipient in team, that your behavior shapes every team you serve and that you affect the team at least as much as it affects you. Acknowledge that not attending t team performance is a choice and that you are choosing to put yourself at the mercy of chance. Accept that if you are in a situation of shared responsibility and/or shared reward, then the quality and productivity of the relationships are worthy of your focus. Learn what behaviors and processes lead to successful teams and exhibit them" (Avery, 2001, p.28).

A team work enables an individual to communicate more and learn more and share in this process. An introvert personality let us take for example can cope to open up more while coming in association with other co workers in a team and tend to maximize job performances. Work distribution makes it easier to finish a proposed job faster and more efficiently. A team is one of the best places to work at as it joins forces of different abilities to find out a solution of problem. When one individual in a team excels in critical thinking other individuals may also outshine in organizing and planning. Hence a team not only builds network among each other but also paves way of trust on each other expertise.

Conclusion

This paper studied in details selected soft skills and their relevance at workplaces. One o the most essential facto today at workplaces which progressively assists in resolving problems, working better and maximizing job performance today around the world is the inculcation of soft skills in one's personality. It not only alters one's personality for good but also imbibes other necessary skills too. Positive attitude, good communication skills, maintaining work ethics and team work are not the only skills soft skills restrict to. There are many other and good number of soft skills internationally considered essential and cannot be done without. The present paper manifests the relevance of soft skills at work places and the need to succeed in this highly competitive world. The paper directs ways for employees at workplaces to value the need to

think positive, communicate well, rely on core values and ethics and work in team. Today many institutions frame course studies highlighting the education on soft skills. Also, as soon as the young graduates join at work places they are trained more on soft skills and are coached to cope with challenges and never miss an opportunity. Soft skills master the purpose of every employee at any workplace that is to be successful. Careful analyses of augmenting soft skills into self can not only work wonders on relationships but also on job performances.

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