REVIEW ARTICLE

SOFT SKILLS FOR ENHANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY PROSPECTS OF JOB-SEEKERS

GEETHA. S
Assistant Professor,
Dept of Humanities and Social Sciences
Puducherry Technological University, Puducherry-14

ABSTRACT

Thanks to globalization and rapid industrialization, there has been a manifold increase in the number of organisations functioning in India. The smooth functioning of any organisation largely depends on the professionals and hence it is paramount for them to possess effective people skills. With employability being the catchword of the day, and competition from many a quarter, it has become mandatory for employees to hone their soft skills. According to Barun K.Mitra (2011) "Personality and soft skills are the indispensable wheels that help the monolith of modern industry run smoothly." The important soft skills like communication, team working, interpersonal, leadership and time management skills among others facilitate a professional's career growth. Barun Mitra also further points out that "Hard Skills reflect what you know. Soft Skills indicate who you really are." S.P.Dhanavel in his book *English and Soft Skills* rightly points out that if youngsters are not employed it is not due to their technical prowess but due to their lack of proficiency in English and soft skills that are necessary for their careers. This paper seeks to throw light on the necessity/need to equip job seekers with soft skills for their professional growth and career progression.

Keywords: employability, catchword, people skills, career growth, lack of proficiency in English

Introduction

Thanks to globalization and rapid industrialization, there has been a manifold increase in the number of organisations functioning in India. The smooth functioning of any organisation largely depends on the professionals and hence it is paramount for them to possess effective people skills. With employability being the catchword of the day, and competition from many a quarter, it has become mandatory for employees to hone their soft skills. According to Barun K.Mitra(2011),"Personality and soft skills are the indispensable wheels that help the monolith of modern industry run smoothly." The important soft skills like communication, team working, interpersonal, leadership and time management skills among others facilitate a professional's career growth. Barun Mitra also further points out that "Hard Skills reflect what you know. Soft Skills indicate who you really are." S.P.Dhanavel in his book rightly points out that if youngsters are not employed it is not due to their technical prowess but due to their lack of proficiency in English and soft skills that are necessary for their careers.

Importance of Soft Skills

Due to rapid industrialization and high economic growth, there is an increase or surge in job opportunities. The stiff and intense competition both among the companies and the contenders has accelerated the need for employees to be industry-fit or industry-ready. With plethora of job opportunities available in various sectors and automobiles, aviation, textiles, hosiery, hospitality, IT and ITES, employees need to utilize the opportunities that come in the way to the hilt. As employees in organizations need to work in a *multicultural, multilinguistic*, and *multiethnic* set up, possession of definite skill sets is paramount. Globalization has brought in a drastic shift in hiring professionals with *soft skills* or *people skills* gaining equal prominence along with the technical skills.

However, there is a huge gap between the skills possessed by the job seekers and skillsets expected of them by the industries. It is an undeniable fact that the current education system is not laying much emphasis on building life skills and professional skills of young graduates. Due to the gap in the skillsets, companies are forced to extensively train the freshers before taking them in companies which causes enormous costs to the companies. Companies today want youngsters to be equipped with skills in artificial intelligence and cyber security and also professional skills like the ability to communicate with ease and work in teams. Thanks to automation, employees need to up skill themselves in order to stay afloat in their organisations. As per a survey conducted by The National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) in 2019, India produces around 15 lakh engineering graduates every year, out of which only 2.5 lakh of them are employable. This is a clear pointer to the employability gap found among job seekers in India, and the need to initiate urgent remedial measures so as to tide over the manpower crisis. N.R. Narayan Murthy had once said: "Engineering colleges in India are churning out only 25 percent quality engineers, and nearly 80-85 percent of youngsters are not suitably trained for any job." It is the lack of practical knowledge and exposure to industry that acts as a dampener for new entrants to get into the job market and succeed at their workplace.

As reported in https://community.nasscom.in, "… the World Economic Forum Report, launched in October 2020 stated that 40% of employees would need to learn new skills in the coming years and would be expected to perform distinct roles within the company. … around 94% of business leaders expect their employees to acquire new skills on the job…. if India wishes to establish itself as a skilled nation in the future, it must invest in skilling, reskilling and up skilling of its youth" thus pointing to the indispensability of soft skills in furthering professionals' careers.

What are Soft Skills?

Soft Skills refers to a cluster of personality traits or attributes that shape an individual, and contribute to his/her professional and personal success. While there is an ever increasing demand for multiskilled workforce, the actual number of job aspirants possessing the skills is few and far between. Hence it has become imperative for the prospective employees to equip themselves with the employable skills so as to gain a strong foothold in the industry. The dearth of highly skilled workforce will hamper the growth of any organisation, and it is imperative to equip the job seekers with the soft skills so as to produce competent workforce for the organizations. .

The skills deficit found among the job aspirants needs to be bridged by imparting *skills-based training* so as to enable the students to reap the rich dividends of the expansion of the job sector. It is employability-oriented education - *non-technical knowledge, skills and good attitude* that are essential for winning and retaining a job. The grooming of the students in the institutes itself by the industry representatives will enable them to become industry-ready and synchronise themselves with the industry expectations.

Students may be technically sound, but their expertise will be to no avail if they fail to articulate the information, data and ideas with aplomb and ease. The ability to articulate unambiguously is the key to success, and mere technical competence sans articulation skills will not take employees places in their career. With the job sector opening up, it has become imperative for the new entrants to constantly sharpen and fine-tune the mandated skills so as to make it big in the industry.

Some of the skills most sought after in the industry are:

a) Communication Skills
b) Interpersonal Skills
c) Team working and leadership skills
d) The ability to participate in a GD/attending job interviews
e) The ability to craft a resume devoid of errors
f) Logical and Analytical skills
g) Listening skills
h) Time management skills
i) Goal setting and decision-making skills
j) Negotiation skills
k) Problem Solving (Trouble shooting skills).
l) Project management abilities

The lack of exposure to diverse environments and the poor emphasis on LSRW in schools have resulted in students finding it hard to express complex thoughts, ideas with ease. The fact that nearly 80% of engineering graduates, according to media reports, are unemployable for want of effective soft skills points to the growing importance of possessing effective soft skills. There is a world of difference between erudition and articulation. Possessing knowledge on a particular subject is certainly different from possessing the ability to express that knowledge. Mere possession of knowledge alone would not guarantee success in the job market. It is indeed the right blend of domain skills and soft skills that would be a recipe for the professional success of individuals.

What are Hard Skills?

Hard Skills are learned skills or technical know-how because they can be imparted down the line to students. For e.g, if a person does not know how to use a dictionary, instructions can be given to him for referring a dictionary. Some other examples of Hard Skills are marketing, driving, consulting, administration, supervising, teaching and so on. On the other hand, ***Soft Skills*** are ***intuitive skills*** that cannot be imparted because they are a part of one's personality (the finer nuances of one's personality). For example, we cannot learn to be honest because honesty is ***innate, inherent.*** Some examples of Soft Skills are adaptability, analysis, assertiveness, creativity and so on.

Hard Skills complement Soft Skills

Hard Skills or technical skills are specific, quantifiable, job-centric and task-based whereas, Soft Skills are non-technical, generic, broadly applicable, personality-driven, intangible and not quantifiable. Hard Skills are referred to as IQ's while Soft Skills are called EQ's. Both Hard and Soft skills complement each other and one cannot be groomed at other's expense. A right blend of both the skills is required to attain success both on professional and personal front. The steady growth of an individual in an organisation largely hinges on his/her ability to utilise both hard and soft skills to the optimum.

The significance of the Soft skills varies from profession or vocation to vocation. For e.g. in IT and ITES sectors, possession of communication skills, listening skills, problem solving skills (trouble shooting skills) is a prerequisite. In IT and ITES sectors employees need to work in a cross-cultural environment, where mere technical competence will not suffice to serve the clients and achieve career progression. The new entrants face hiccups when they enter industry owing to their poor English language capabilities, weak communication skills and inefficient interpersonal skills thereby making them incompetent at their workplace.

How to develop the skills of job seekers?

In any organisation, as employees are expected to don the roles and responsibilities bestowed on them, they need to possess the right set of skills. Any deviation in this regard will only spell doom both for the organisations and for the new entrants. While MNCs and other organisations scout for candidates with strong technical and non-technical skills, many a time, they are forced to choose from the talent available and then

train them in soft skills. This training is necessary for candidates for working and interacting with customers, clients, and counterparts across countries and cultures. The need of the hour, therefore, is Industry-Institute tie-ups that will pave the way for students to get first-hand information of the industry, the work culture and their expectations. To curtail the mismatch between demand and supply of workforce, the industry needs to impart hands-on training to the job aspirants, and put in place skilled workforce. The steady growth of an individual in any organisation hinges on his/her ability to utilise the soft skills to the optimum, and hence it is imperative for the new entrants to constantly enhance and fine-tune their skills for the benefit of the self and the organisation they work for.

Conclusion

The lack of exposure to real life situations and hands-on-experience dents the employability prospects of the graduates by putting them at a great disadvantage. It is only with appropriate training in soft skills that the employability prospects of graduates can be furthered, individual failing which students might end up losing their chances of making it big in the industry. The holistic development of a student largely hinges on the efforts that he/she puts in honing their soft skills. As Soft skills are the deciding factor in tilting a job either in one's favour or against him/her, it is incumbent on the part of job seekers equip themselves with the skillsets required for their professional growth. There should be no laxity on the part of students in developing the people skills, lest their career prospects might stand negated.

References

Barun K.Mitra "Personality Development and Soft Skills" New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Dhanvel, S.P. *English and Soft Skills*. Orient BlackSwan. 2013.

Lata, Pushp and Sanjay Kumar. "Technology Enabled Teaching of Professional communication Courses: problems and Perspectives." *The Journal of English Language Teaching* (2010) Vol. 48/3: 33

Lata, Pushp and Sanjay Kumar. *Communication Skills*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011

Lata, Pushp and Sanjay Kumar. *Communicate or Collapse: A Handbook of Effective Public Speaking, Group Discussions and Interviews*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall, 2007.

Manmohan, Joshi. *Soft Skills*. Bookboon.com. 2017.

Rizvi, Ashraf M. *Effective Technical Communication*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw, 2005.

The Hindu Education Plus July 30 2012.

The Hindu Education Plus December 2 2013.

Websites:

- https://thelogicalindian.com/trending/nasscom-points-at-failing-education-system-for-huge-employability-gap-among-engineers-40551
- https://community.nasscom.in/communities/talent-skills/india-2030-vision-assessments-creating-skilled-nation
- https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/fresher/nasscom-says-there-exists-employability-gap-in-graduates-asks-education-system-to-do-more/articleshow/98
- https://nasscomfoundation.org/skills-for-employability
- https://thelogicalindian.com/trending/nasscom-points-at-failing-education-system-for-huge-employability-gap-among-engineers-40551
- https://www.thehansindia.com/andhra-pradesh/are-skills-getting-priority-in-our-education-system--747239