

Soft Skills – A Management Introspect of an Indian Techie

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Abstract - Soft skills are fast becoming the deal breaker in many of today's hiring decisions. The skills not normally found on curriculum vitae are of growing importance in a world where business is marked by 'hot' buzzwords such as globalization; decentralisation; and lean management dethroning the old autocratic style of bullying management tactics which are unfortunately far more prevalent than is desirable. Further in an age when relationships between individuals and organizations are getting more and more complex, 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 success in professional or personal life. The ability to deal with one's feelings and understand the feelings of others in any given situation helps one to complement academic intelligence/cognitive capacities (IQ) with a humane understanding of issues. This ability is known as Emotional Intelligence or EI. Soft skills or Emotional Intelligence Skills strengthen and empowers an aspirant to understand "who they are" and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation. Thus though it's an undaunted fact that technical and job-related skills are a must, they are not sufficient when it comes to progressing up the ladder. Technical skills alone do not suffice a person to be globally competitive. The wide rivers of culture, language and environment can only be crossed by being proficient with soft skills that improve self-awareness enhancing socio-emotional adjustment in the society.

Key words - soft skills, hard skills, competition, business

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INTRODUCTION

Successful and sustained businesses, at their cores, share a universal trait—they are focused on providing value to and sharing values with the societies in which they operate. Our world is rapidly changing – and the changes affect every business, every industry, and every country. The future growth and competitiveness of business are at stake. The business world eagerly awaits tomorrow's leaders who are agile, aware and adaptive. Thus Preparing future business leaders to take on a leadership role can have a significant impact not only moving society forward on some of the most pressing and difficult issues of today, but also in further tapping the creative and entrepreneurial potential of business. Therefore the overarching need of the day is to explore the dearth on short shelf life of hard – skills which are impacting career advancements of a techie with swagger and brashness of technology.

For long Hard skills and soft skills were like chalk and cheese. The predicament of Soft skills is that they are essentially people skills -- the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills that determine your strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator, and conflict mediator. "Hard" skills, on the other hand, are more along the lines of what might appear on one's resume --education, experience and level of expertise. Hard skills are the technical skills required within the confines of a domain. They encompass the following dimensions like Processes, Tools, and Techniques. To believe the undue, hard skills tend to be specific to a certain

type of task or activity; soft skills are broadly applicable as personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects. In brief it is Soft skills and competencies that make all the difference. Two persons may have same hard skills but the one having better soft skills or practical intelligence takes over.

Soft skills are an approach to ones work. The best part about mastering them is that the application of these skills is not limited to one's profession, but their scope reaches all aspects of life. Technical skills may teach one how to meet the expectations of the job, but soft skills teach one to succeed, and to exceed expectations. It is surprising that we spend our time educating almost exclusively in technical skills. It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get and keep the job. 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 comparable evaluation results. And where do they find this competitive advantage? In bringing along additional knowledge and skills, added up by convincing personal traits and habits. This sounds familiar whereas in the past the mastering of hard skills was rated first and soft skills were considered as "nice to have", the perception has been turned upside down to a "must have" connotation.

It is widely acknowledged that India will soon be facing a serious manpower shortage. The phenomenal growth that the Indian economy has witnessed in the last decade was largely driven by the growth in the service sector and particularly fuelled by industries such as IT Services, ITeS, Retail, Hospitality, Travel, and Financial Services. This growth is now threatened because the effectiveness and growth of India's talent pool has been seriously constrained due to a deepening soft skill crisis. As the employee base gets larger every year, the number of new hires required to sustain this growth rate has increased sharply, further exacerbating this situation within a short duration, It becomes apparent very quickly that the new recruited employee has a lot of 'venting' to do and little interest in the job itself. This de-motivates the recruiter who would be cautiously paranoid with future recruitment proceedings.

On work front a performance oriented work environment seeks a candidate with personal traits, who can get things done without ruffling too many feathers, who eventually can manage soft side of the job firstly by being an efficient leader with the ability to convey complex ideas easily, clearly articulate what must be accomplished, keep the team moving towards a common goal, foster an environment that allows team members to communicate openly and honestly, admit their own mistakes without losing respect, negotiate, listen and facilitate. A leader should be at the pinnacle of spirit at periods of transitions in ones organisations with commitment to planned changes indicating a strong correlation between skills and company culture. There by his own vision, values and behavioural pattern a leader tries to make ordinary people display extraordinary performance. Secondly, Today's business world is all about communication. Companies are constantly growing and expanding at a fast pace, and they need their employees to be doing the same which is intrinsically to reach some understanding of each other, learn to like each other, influence one another, build trust, and learn more about themselves and how people perceive them. People who communicate effectively know how to interact with others flexibly, skilfully, and responsibly, but without sacrificing their own needs and integrity creating transparency and rapport heading the thought process in the right direction. . One may have the 'hard' skill of knowing what usage is correct and what is incorrect, but lack the 'soft' skills of knowing when to use only standard forms and in what tone to use them." Thus communication contributes to social competence where an improved small talk enhances critical and structured thinking. Thirdly, fostering team work at place of one man show, a need for an appropriate mix of skills working together formally that can guarantee the

achievement of defined objectives. To act and enact Responsibility without authority is a challenge, a purview where an aspiring candidate would hardly be fitting into because he has been the master of his thoughts and deeds until off recently till he received his previous semester grades. An individual trait needs derailment for the good of "we" than a "I" indicating successful conclusion given the intricacies of the job.

The plethora's of soft skill has also to touch upon personal traits , an essential part of "portable qualities" like flexibility in understanding and acceptance of individual preferences creativity that is nurtured by an opportunity hath never let go, problem solving skills embarking on the verge of negotiation to reasoning, persuasion and suggested alternatives on arenas of conflicts like disagreements over priorities, allocation of resources, quality of work , clear ambiguities of a pitfall degenerating into irreconcilable situations that may prohibit them from ever working together productively again. Self management by avoiding distractions on time wasters by assiduous efforts, constantly watch out for behaviours to escalate to the point that they become appreciable in terms of self esteem, integrity, honesty, empathy, courtesy, etiquette, good manners strengthening relationships on cross cultural intercept of culture awareness and culture feedbacks improving insights into one's own consciousness which often turbulent with ones values of incorporating ethics into everyday business practice and decision making.

Changes are inevitable. One important change management issue is dealing with user resistance as changes are inseparable features as new developments in technology are brought about continually It is, therefore, necessary to adjust the plan accordingly to accommodate changes. Any alteration should be identified and evaluated before committing changes. The suggested and foreseeable changes that could churn the right pathway and bridge the gap between demand and supply of manoeuvred labour could be profoundly nothing but education with modifications as well as ramification in design and delivery coupled with training building new dimension of career advancement.

On educational forefront imbibing soft skill in a subtle manner through pedagogical insights can be banal and insipid where students lack a dynamic attitude to learn soft skills in a conventional manner. The development of soft skills was articulated as a major challenge for these mostly technically and disciplinary oriented universities. In particular, competent and motivated lecturers were identified as a central requirement to meet future demands. To develop these competencies, education institutions

need to go way beyond to include learning theories, social psychology and behavioural science communication, facilitation (including group dynamics), and organisation and management science. Even more critical than cognitive abilities are elements of personal development. These need to be understood conceptually and mastered practically. Incorporating elements of personal development in the curriculum calls for teachers/lecturers with new ideas and competencies. In our opinion, this does not necessarily mean replacing existing disciplinary courses with soft skills oriented courses, or introducing separate courses in soft skills, but interweaving them with existing courses thereby transferring knowledge in an interactive rather than prescriptive form. On an intuitive note sensitization of soft skills in the curriculum during project internship would serve the purpose. Indeed the long term economic strength of knowledge economy rests on an education system that could develop potential talent, reducing gap between subject specific skills and sector specific skills. A mechanism in place to facilitate interaction between industry and academia to do away sceptic attitude of entrepreneurs on the nature and level of involvement of education policies and programmes which are often outdated as the pace of change in industry is faster than the ability of the policy to react. Further lack of business involvement in the design of curriculum has led to isolationism of qualification where certificate understates quality perception and does not quantify competence. Thus qualification must focus on gaining skills and thereby gain value to certificates otherwise education would be weary of locus and focus. In brief education should bridge the gap between expectation and aspiration of employer and employee to gain and retain perceived value in labour market.

In today's tight labour market, firms are thinking about strategies to attract and retain quality people. In doing so, a positive training and learning culture is a must. Training is an ongoing skills audit to

impact end behaviour .It is an act to rejuvenate an employee to keep them happy in their current job and thereby add value to the organisation. Training initiates to learn to do Jobs better or perhaps learn new skills or technologies that can be applied to the company's goals, satisfy government requirements, to ensure safety, or to prevent lawsuits or other forms of company loss. Training often takes place through an in-house training department, paid to outside training companies, or a combination of the two. Measuring rate of investment (ROI) on any training, results need to focus on core areas such as productivity, morale and staff turnover, which are in line with business needs and are of clear value to the organisation thereby justifying initial expectation with cost. Further the burdened hourly rate, estimated loss of productivity, and training expenses must be calculated. Very often there are no specific or measurable goals to achieve for a training session but training solution is aligned with core business needs. It's often worth the time and money only in the long run with assignments down the road which reduces failure rate. Further Job specific training should contribute to the employee being considered as the most valuable human capital asset to the organisation.

Conclusion:-As a nation, we need to cultivate our human resources and enhance our educational opportunities rather than letting out each year "semi literate lumpens". As a business community, we need to support public and private sector efforts to equip our young people with the skills they need to compete in an increasingly demanding global environment. As individual corporate leaders, we need to recognize that success depends not just on our own knowledge and wisdom but also upon our ability to recruit, develop and empower an effective workforce. We also need to model the qualities that we require in our employees – and demonstrate the value of incorporating ethics expeditiously to dissipate fears of challenging global competitive execution of business.

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