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Soft Skills Significance for Learning and Career Achievement

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Abstract

Soft skills are essential to a successful profession, as well as to social relationships in every culture. Employers looking to hire recent college grads are also looking for these qualities. Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills for learning and employment were the primary focus of this research. 190 undergraduate business management students from four Indian university campuses participated in a research to gather data. The majority of those polled said that soft skills were important for building bridges within communities and advancing one's career. However, they did not believe that these abilities would have a significant impact on their grades. The student was willing to accept just five soft skills: cooperation and teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and time management. Students' soft skills may be improved in a variety of ways, and these strategies may also improve their career prospects, according to this article.

Introduction

Today's business climate is more complicated, unpredictable, and competitive than ever before because to a wide range of characteristics. There are several types of companies, and each one has a distinct benefit in terms of human capital. Employers like to work with people that are self-motivated, willing to learn, and have a positive outlook when it comes to hiring, keeping, and recommending them [1]. To succeed in the workplace, employers like to see a well-balanced combination of talents among their employees, and in addition to discipline-based knowledge and skills, adequate levels of soft skills are deemed essential. Organizational goals and objectives cannot be achieved only by the use of specialized or practical skills. Because their employees will likewise be participating in various levels of leadership and decision-making. Employees must also be able to communicate effectively with their clients and other investors inside the company.

Soft skills refer to a person's characteristics, such as their sense of humor, warmth, and openness. Problem-solving, communication, time management and decision-making are just some of the soft skills that may help you succeed in the workplace. Burchell and Hodges [4] conducted a survey of company owners to examine their views on the importance of different talents. A study found that the ability and desire to learn, cooperate and work together, communicate interpersonally, have enthusiasm and energy, as well as the ability to solve problems ranked as eight of the top ten most important soft skills. In a survey of more than 7,000 managers in India, soft skills were shown to be the most important competence in almost all of the 50 different vocations studied.

Even in technological environments, there are several occupations [5]. Employers increasingly value soft skills, but it is equally important for students to recognize the importance of developing these talents and to make deliberate choices about how to do so. Porter cites [6]. Many students in business do not place much importance on developing their soft skills, according to the author. As suggested by Rynes et al [7], this might explain why business students' attitudes toward interactive courses that focus on developing soft skills are often negative, as well as why they are reluctant to enroll in such courses. As a

result, business graduates entering the labor sector have a lack of awareness of the importance of soft skills.

As a result, educational institutions are now under increased pressure to develop the soft skills of their pupils. Using a core soft skills record test, Kumara and Sahasranam [8] evaluated the soft skills of engineering students in India. They argued that well-planned training programs may help students build a sense of self-confidence and cultivate their soft skills. Real-world companies and conditions may help business students improve their writing abilities, according to Addams et al. [9]. This is especially true for the writing of convincing business letters. Students and professors at several Indian institutions were surveyed to get insights into their perceptions of the competency of soft skills in information systems programs. According to one study, students were more appreciative of the time spent on soft skills than faculty members. Furthermore, a number of studies have emphasized the importance of soft skills, which should be included in the prospectus, making it easier for students to acquire them.

Most research on this topic have been conducted from the perspective of business owners, and only a small number have looked at students' attitudes and views regarding soft skills. Many of these studies were conducted in India, where the learning environment and work culture are somewhat different from those in other Asian nations. As a result, it is worthwhile to examine students' views on soft skills from a different perspective and context. To find out how business organization students see the importance of soft skills in their education and future careers was the study's primary goal. These include students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills, self-efficacy in their ability to exert control over these abilities, the importance of academic organizations in the development of soft skills, and the role of these organizations in promoting soft skills.

1. Methodology

Vishweshwaraya University (VTU), Central University Karnataka (CUK), Osmania University of Hyderabad (Osm) and Jawaharlal Nehru Technology University (JNTU) Hyderabad were the four Indian universities that participated in the study. Multiple choice and rating scale matrix questions were used to gather answers throughout the questionnaire. Many questions were closed-ended, but when necessary, respondents were given the option of providing more information or making comments. The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study's ethics. The convenience sampling method was used to pick the survey participants. An oral request to participate in this research was made to undergraduate business management students at the four institutions that were chosen. Students who showed an interest in participating received a copy of the survey. For two weeks in the second quarter of 2011, 188 students participated in the poll.

3 Findings

The survey's results and analysis are presented in the following parts.

3.1 The responses of the respondents

This research had a comparable number of contributors from the four academies: 51 from VTU, 50 from CUK, 49 from OSM, and 49 from JNTU (44). The data research is based on 180 totally filled-in survey forms since five respondents did not finish the survey. 68.5 percent of the students were from India, while 32.4 percent were from abroad. In terms of gender, there were more female responses (56,7%) than male respondents (40.7 percent). 70 respondents (39 percent) were in their second year of school, while 41 (22.8 percent) were in their first year of study, 54 (26.9 percent) were in their third year of study, and just 19 (9.7 percent) were in their fourth year of study, according to the survey. The year of study of five pupils was not stated. Awareness of soft skills is 3.2

We asked the students who contributed what they thought were the most important soft skills. To find out whether they have a good grasp of soft skills, we conducted the study. A list of 14 competencies was compiled after conducting a thorough literature research. Fewer than 40 students (21.3 percent) picked all of the skills out of the 180 students that took the survey, demonstrating their naiveté about the

importance of soft skills. Leadership, communication and negotiating were rated as the most important soft skills by the student (see Table 1).

Table 1. Skills considered as soft skills by the respondents (multiple responses)

Ranking	Soft Skills	Frequency (n=180)
1	Communication skills	142
2	Leadership skills	117
3	Persuasion skills	111
4	Negotiation skills	106
5	Conflict management	92
6	Time management	74
7	Problem solving	70
8	Teamwork spirit	71
9	Creative problem solving	71
10	Personal effectiveness	63
11	Strategic thinking	62
12	Confident work attitude	55
13	Enthusiasm to learn	49
14	Desire towards work	43

A majority of the students didn't consider good work attitude, eagerness to learn, and enthusiasm for work to be soft skills. Other non-verbal communication skills

Proclaimed the importance of a person's soft talents 3.1

It was determined that soft skills were important enough to warrant a series of remarks from the pupils. About two-thirds of students either agreed wholeheartedly or strongly agreed that gaining and maintaining a higher-paying job relied heavily on developing soft skills (see Table 2). Furthermore, 103 (55.1%) of the respondents agreed with the notion that soft skills are difficult to develop when compared to expert knowledge and abilities. Some respondents were bothered or strongly disagreed with the claims that repetition could not help enhance soft skills and such abilities were not as important as expert knowledge and expertise, depending on the question. A solid understanding of the importance and value of soft skills can be seen from this.

Table 2. General perceptions of soft skills (n=187)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
Soft skills are serious for career improvement	7	8	40	84	53
Soft skills are extremely sought after by employers	7	9	42	89.5	35
Soft skills are important for getting a better job	6	9	49	96	35
Soft skills are hard to learn compared to professional knowledge	4	30	47	82	21
Soft skills cannot be enhanced through practice	26	82	46	29	7

Soft skills are not as important as professional knowledge	49	52	39	32	13
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SD: strongly disagree, D: disagree, N: neutral, A: agree, SA: strongly agree

On the 7-point semantic variance scale, students were asked to rank the importance of soft skills for different purposes. 'Receiving along with others' (mean score 5.70) was deemed the most important soft skill, followed by 'professional development,' as seen in Table 3. (mean score 5.46). However, the students viewed these talents as being of little importance to their academic success.

Table 3. Importance of soft skills

Purpose	n	Mean (1~7)	SD
Getting along with people	188	6.10	1.36
Career advancement	188	5.48	1.62
Finding a job	188	5.01	1.62
Academic performance	188	4.23	1.81

Students were asked to assess the relative importance of a set of 14 previously studied soft skills for job purposes in order to further validate their understanding of the importance of these talents. Teamwork, problem solving, leadership, time management, and decision-making were the top five abilities (see Table 4).

Table 4. Importance of soft skills for employment

Soft Skills	n	Mean (1~7)	SD
Leadership	187	5.33	1.45
Teamwork and collaboration	187	5.27	1.38
Decision-making	187	5.23	1.53
Problem-solving	186	5.58	1.29
Time management	187	5.54	1.26
Passion and optimism	187	5.19	1.15
Critical thinking skills	183	5.17	1.35
Willingness to learn	187	5.56	1.47
Self-motivation and self-direction	186	5.26	1.50
Making presentations	187	4.05	1.64
Small group discussions	187	4.00	1.60
Writing businesscommunications	187	5.91	1.22
Writing proposals	187	5.68	1.19
Writing memoranda	186	5.62	1.14

Worryingly, five soft skills in the area of communication seemed to be the least important when it came to finding a job. The majority of the respondents (145 out of a total of 752, percent) considered it to be

a soft talent. So, despite the fact that they list communication skills as a soft talent, they don't consider them important while seeking for work, despite the time and effort they put into applying for jobs and attending interviews.

Soft skills are critical in a wide range of vocations.

In a survey, students were asked to identify the importance of soft skills in several business-related careers. For roles where business professionals engage often with clients and other stakeholders, such as marketing executives, sales employees and insurance advisors, students believed that soft skills were very important (see Table 5). Contrary to popular belief, they believed that back office workers, such as financial analysts, auditors, and accountants, required a lower degree of soft skills. Despite the fact that they may not interact with clients on a regular basis, business professionals in these positions nonetheless require strong interpersonal skills to do their duties successfully.

Table 5. Level of soft skills required by different category of professionals (n=188)

Profession	Mean (1~7)	SD
Marketing Executives	5.56	1.11
Sales Personnel	5.64	1.50
Insurance Service Consultants	5.42	1.40
Media & Advertising Executives	5.22	1.40
Corporate Communications Officers	5.56	1.27
Human Resource Officers	5.54	1.29
Project Management Executives	5.47	1.26
Financial Service Consultants	5.22	1.21
Business Administrators	4.66	1.57
Stock Brokers	4.77	1.66
Bank Executives	4.66	1.67
Financial Analysts	4.66	1.29
Auditors	4.29	1.60
Accountants	3.88	1.66

3.1 Students' perception of the level of soft skills possessed by them

Student evaluations of soft skills were solicited from each participant. The top five soft skills requested by the students were: a desire to learn, collaboration, enthusiasm and optimism, time management, and self-motivation and self-direction (see Table 6).

Table 6. Self-assessment of the level of soft skills possessed by the respondents (n=188)

Soft Skills	Mean (1~7)	SD
Willingness to learn	5.42	1.22
Teamwork and collaboration	5.42	1.24
Passion and optimism	5.01	1.20
Time management	5.02	1.34
Self-motivation and self-direction	4.97	1.24
Decision-making	4.97	1.21
Problem-solving	4.98	1.20
Leadership	4.91	1.32

Critical thinking skills	4.91	1.36
Small group discussions	4.83	1.26
Writing proposals	4.63	1.13
Making presentations	4.63	1.46
Writing business communications	4.54	1.22
Writing memoranda	4.42	1.23

Table 7. Correlation between perceived importance and skills level

Soft Skills	Correlation
Willingness to learn	.395(**)
Teamwork and cooperation	.384(**)
Passion and optimism	.355(**)
Time management	.231(**)
Self-motivation and self-direction	.416(**)
Decision-making	.244(**)
Problem-solving	.235(**)
Leadership	.186(*)
Critical thinking skills	.305(**)
Small group discussions	.524(**)
Writing proposals	.121
Making presentations	.529(**)
Writing business communications	.184(*)
Writing memoranda	.259(**)

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.4 Desire for improving soft skills

When asked which soft skills they thought they should develop, the people who took the survey were given a choice. Leadership and communication were the two most sought-after soft talents among students (see Table 8). Previously, these two abilities were recognized as the two most crucial soft talents (see Table 1). These talents were ranked lowest when communication abilities were broken down into more specific communication abilities (see Table 4). The pupils seemed to have some misconceptions regarding the extent of certain Communication abilities.

Table 8. Soft skills needing improvement (multiple responses)

Ranking	Soft Skills	Frequency (n=188)
1	Leadership skills	88
2	Communication skills	87
3	Persuasion skills	83

4	Negotiation skills	80
5	Conflict resolution	79
6	Time management	71
7	Strategic thinking	68
8	Problem solving	63
9	Personal effectiveness	62
9 (tied)	Creative problem solving	62
11	Positive work attitude	39
12	Willingness to learn	38
13	Teamwork spirit	35
14	Passion towards work	34

People who participated in the poll were given the option of selecting which soft skills they believed needed improvement. The two most sought-after soft skills among students were those of leadership and communication (see Table 8). The importance of both of these soft skills has long been acknowledged (see Table 1). When communication skills were split down into more specialized communication abilities, these talents scored the lowest (see Table 4). A few of the students seemed to have erroneous ideas about how far they could go in terms of their communication skills.

Table 9. Barriers to practicing communication skills (n=188)

	Barriers	Frequency
1	Lack of confidence	89
2	Nervousness	88
3	Shyness	59
4	Lack of proper training	58
5	Non-encouraging environment	51
6	Language deficiency	48
7	Lack of knowledge	47
8	Cultural barriers	38

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Table 10. Participation in soft skills development programs (n=187)

Programs/Activities	Never	Rarely	Often
Workshops/ guest talks	11.2 %	70.1 %	18.7 %
Job hunting skills	18.2 %	65.8 %	16.0 %
Company orientation sessions	22.5 %	58.8 %	18.7 %
Career advising sessions	27.8 %	55.6 %	16.6 %
Students coffee sessions	27.8 %	49.2 %	23.0 %

The kids' perspectives on the potential advantages of various school-based programs to improve their soft skills were also captured using a set of statements. Both the good and bad aspects of these initiatives were discussed in these remarks. As many as 61% of the participants said that soft skills programs gave them hands-on experience, increased their skill levels, and demonstrated how they could use soft skills in a variety of circumstances (see Table 11). Two assertions, however, garnered divided replies, indicating that the content of these soft skills programs is less relevant and cannot be readily implemented in reality. According to the survey results, more people disagreed than agreed that these projects are purely hypothetical in nature. Furthermore, they were certain that what they learned from these programs could be put into practice.

Table 11. Perceptions of the benefits of soft skills programs (multiple responses)

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
Provided opportunities for hands-on experience	5	5	54	99	24
Provided me opportunities to boost my soft skills	6	5	57	85	34
Showed adaptability of soft skills in many situations	3	11	59	92	22
The contents are not sorelevant with soft skills improvement	7	45	75	53	7
The contents cannot be easily applied into practice	10	42	77	45	12
Showed the usefulness of soft skills only in theory	19	41	74	37	15

SD: strongly disagree, D: disagree, N: neutral, A: agree, SA: strongly agree

3.7 Suggestions for improving students' soft skills

It was asked of the responders that they provide recommendations for actions that institutions may take to enhance the soft skills of their students. 60% of students said that additional soft-skills-building exercises should be introduced in the curriculum (see Table 12). More soft skills seminars and hands-on exercises were also recommended by almost 45 percent of the students. Most students wanted to learn soft skills as part of their professional training, rather than having to pay for separate programs on the subject.

Table 12. Soft skills development measures to be undertaken taken by universities (multiple responses)

Suggested Measures	Frequency
Incorporate more soft skills development activities into the curriculum	114
Organize more workshops	84
Organize more hands-on activities	81
Arrange more internship programs	75
Organize more company orientation talks	54

Respondents also provided recommendations on how students might improve their soft skills. The majority of respondents said that students should attend professional training seminars to improve their interpersonal skills (see Table 13). In addition, 42 percent of the respondents said that students should participate in student organizations and interest groups that might help them develop their interpersonal skills.

Table 13. Soft skills development measures to be undertaken by students (multiple responses)

Suggested Measures	Frequency
Attend professional training workshops	93
Join hobby clubs providing softskills development opportunities	79
Participate in activities organized by the student unions	72
Read books and articles on softskills-related topics	70

Conclusion

Students' views on the significance of soft skills in the workplace and in school were the focus of this research. The study found that most business management students in India were aware of the relevance of soft skills for employment and career progression. Many students, on the other hand, believed that their real soft skills fell short of expectations. Students also believed that communication skills were of the least importance, which is possibly why they made no efforts to develop their communication abilities. It was a cause for worry since, according to earlier surveys, communication abilities were among the most sought-after soft skills by prospective employers. As a result, students must be made aware of the value of good communication skills for advancing in their careers, as well as the best practices for honing them. Another interesting conclusion was that a large majority of students believed that business courses should include instruction in soft skills as well as hard skills. It's possible that this method was chosen because it allowed pupils to put these abilities into practice in a real-world context. It's also likely that students aren't interested in attending university-sponsored soft skill development programs since they're already swamped with professional training. Because of this, it is recommended that business schools and other educational institutions assess and include the required soft skills into their curriculum. They should, however, continue to provide specific programs to assist students hone their soft-skills abilities as well. Self-directed readings and participation in relevant skills development programs and activities are equally vital for students to improve their skill level.

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