

RELEVANCE OF SOFT SKILLS IN CAREER SUCCESS


Mitashree Tripathy

In this fast transforming business economy caused by globalization, it has become incredibly important that employees keep on upgrading their hard skills and polish their soft skills if they aspire for a career that not only pays them well but also promises better opportunities in career development. Though the importance of soft skills is recognised in everyday life, in maintaining interpersonal relationships, in building strategies for success, its implications are mainly found in organisations and workplaces. Soft skills, however, play a significant role in building a career. Today to succeed and survive in the competitive workplace employees are expected to change their attitude, attention, and commitment to work. Besides, they are also expected to develop other abilities like effective communication skills, teamwork, leadership qualities, stress management, emotional intelligence etc. Competition is progressively increasing across workplaces worldwide. The need to be fit, flexible and existing is highly intrinsic. Soft skills thus help deal with challenges as they offer essential factors to influence the success of the employees and the organisations. This paper focuses on discussing the relevance of soft skills in career success, job satisfaction, creating a better work atmosphere and bringing about productivity at the workplace.

KEYWORDS: Soft Skills, Abilities, Competence, Career Success, Job Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills have been attracting a lot of attention among the researchers for its growing relevance in everyday life both personal and professional. The term 'skills' in 'soft skills' refers to the abilities, skills and competencies that are expected in employees for career success. The Oxford Advanced Learner's

Dr. Mitashree Tripathy 
 Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Studies,
 Sri Sri University, Cuttack, India
 Email: mitashreetripathy84@gmail.com

Dictionary defines soft skills as “personal qualities that enable you to communicate well with other people” (Hornby, Sydney & Deuter, 2015, p. 1484). Soft skills as a common person understands are a bunch of personal attributes, personality traits, mannerisms and qualities which aid to express our emotions through behaviour, both verbal and nonverbal communication. These behaviours that are governed by our emotions directly or indirectly affect our relationships, in developing them or butchering them. The term 'soft skills' is used both broadly and narrowly: broadly as a generic term soft skill comprise all those features of emotions, skills and abilities which administer our deliberate presentation of actions. These fields include social grace, emotional intelligence, communication skills, personal habits, cleanliness, friendliness, optimism, cognitive skills, team work, determination, confidence, leadership qualities and many more. Soft skills are termed and comprehended in various ways and in various aspects like life skills, people skills, employability skills, interpersonal skills, workplace skills, social skills and many more.

Medical Dictionary defines life skills as “Any personal ability that helps an individual to cope with people, situational changes, or stress”. Life often casts deadlines, conflicts, confrontations and challenges and fighting with this negativity often makes people depressed and weary. Soft skills prove beneficial as they promote abilities among individuals to meet their everyday challenges effectively in their life. Accordingly, Monoharan entitles life skills as soft skills. He writes “life skills, also known as soft skills, are the skills necessary for successful living. These skills can help people in all respects particularly in making right decisions, communicate effectively and develop self-management talents, to lead a healthy and productive life” (Manoharan, 2013, p. 5). Life skills help the best to receive from life as they prepare humans mentally, sociologically and psychologically to stand against various ordeals which life throws before them. Life skills enable us to be flexible and remain positive thus promoting mental satisfaction, contentment and welfare. Life skills include abilities like self-motivation, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, confidence, determination, patience, self-motivation, goal setting, developing attitude, stress management and many others.

People skills generate abilities to know, understand, and maintain relationships with people. Thompson rightly asserts that good people skills are therefore premised on the ability to recognize one's own feelings and the impact they are having on other people. Without this awareness, interactions between people can be distorted or undermined by the unacknowledged influence of feelings of anger (Thompson, 2015, p. 6). Hence people skills include self-awareness, emotional intelligence, communication skills,

interpersonal skills, friendliness, assertiveness, listening skills, patience and numerous other skills and abilities.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

These are competencies essential for individuals to make themselves employable. Today, a number of students especially the graduates face a number of issues like preparing for a group discussion, building a selling resume, successfully getting through interviews, and placing themselves in a good organisation as they complete their required education. Today employers around the globe are looking for graduates who are not only competent and excellent in their own field of forte or technical skills but who also possess special abilities to meet the progressively increasing demands of the employers thus making themselves stand away from the crowd. Employability skills focuses on abilities from job haunts, to preparing a presentable CV, ability to participate in group discussions to using effective interview techniques and finally placing favourably in the job world. The significance of employability skills also features the ability to survive in the competitive job world. Employability skills include thinking skills such as logical and analytical reasoning; problem solving; capacity to identify access and manage knowledge and information; personal attributes such as imagination; creativity and intellectual rigor; values such as ethical practise, persistence, integrity and tolerance, problem solving, team working, communication and leadership (Chaita, 2016, pp. xi-xii). Under employability skills, to understand the relevance of soft skills it is important to compare it with hard skills. Hard skills are those required to do the job, such as network security, accounting, programming, marketing, data analysis, and graphic design. These skills are typically learned and are quantifiable (Hannon, 2015, p. 31). Like for example, candidates earn a degree after completion of a certain course. This degree helps candidates further to opt and apply for jobs for their professional growth. Hence hard skills are the minimum criteria that make a candidate eligible for certain job role. It is important to understand that hard skills are weighty chiefly when employers search for distinct hard skills during the time of recruitment and if the applicant happens to be not having the specific hard skills at the expected level of degree, such applicant is rejected in the first place itself (Lland, 2013, p. 34). Hard skills are taught, can be measured and are quantifiable. On the other hand, soft skills are difficult to measure and are not quantifiable. Soft skills are significant in supporting the candidates crack an interview and getting placed in organisation. Dorsey asserts that soft skills are often times the area that will determine failure or success for many in the workplace in personal life as well as individual contractor. Some of the

most important people in the world are failing, because though they have mastered the hard skills, they can't cope with the world that is fuelled by soft skills. It is a tough pill to swallow, but we must get this one right or suffer the consequences (Dorsey, 2004, p. 14). Undeniably, hard skills help get an interview call while soft skills help get through the interview and get well placed in a professional platform, violating which raises the chances of getting fired from an organisation. Employability skills include skills like building a selling resume, ability to sit for group discussion, facing interview, paying attention to body language and many more.

Likewise, work skills are important essentials that are expected at every workplace like strong commitment, communication and interpersonal skills, positive attitude, confidence, adaptability, being political savvy, accepting mistakes and learning from them and many more. These skills are the basic requirements that facilitate proper understanding of the roles and responsibilities that individuals at workplaces need to execute, solve and process.

Klaus meets people around the world who have dexterity in technical skills enabling them to excel in their jobs, but lack of soft skills limits their ability to relate with people, self- management behaviours and other important career building skills. She consigns practical methods and elements to vanquish soft skills across job progression and offers important lessons on how to manage workload stress, be a politics savvy at workplace and many more. Very straightforward yet motivating she maintains her hallmark fashion as she describes why soft skills are ignored and what importance they carry in building great lives and relationships professionally. Klaus views that today's organizations value people who are versatile. Presumably, if you've moved around from job to job—within reason, of course, and with good recommendations—you've been exposed to a wide range of situations and have demonstrated your ability to succeed in a business climate marked by constant change. Sometimes we work ourselves up into such a dither that we box ourselves in and fail to see the possibilities (Klaus, 2009, p. 26). Soft skills are widely recognised as essential factors influencing success at workplaces. Proper communication skills, teamwork, commitment, developing leadership skills, managing time, stress, and many more are the important factors of soft skills employers today seek among employees.

Society is made of people and in the term social skills, social refers to interactions between people, the skills refer to making appropriate discriminations, i.e., deciding on what would be the most effective response and the verbal and nonverbal behaviours which facilitate interaction (LeCroy,

1983, p. 92). Hence, employing soft skills in varying spheres of life and society promote societal development and change in order to meet the challenges and obstacles through interaction with the people first.

People lack the proper way to communicate and which is why they fail to maintain stable relationships. Lack of confidence, self-study, constant self-motivation, ability to be presentable may be few of the important reasons. Carneige bestows very practical and applicable approaches in a very lucid style about how to come out of fixed way of thinking and accepting the change. Carneige surmises that if we want to make friends, let's put ourselves out to do things for other people- things that require time, energy, unselfishness and thoughtfulness. He remarks that if one shows genuine interest to reach out to people then one can surely win friends. Showing a genuine interest in others not only win friends for you but may develop in customers a loyalty to your company (Carneige, 2010, p. 62-63).

Most of the times, employees although highly capable of delivering excellent performances, fail to execute the same while working in teams. One of the major reasons are due to the fact that employees generally tend to expect individual growth and thus neglect team growth, thereby affecting the growth of the organisation and subsequently their own. Ramesh believes that the group's well-being is far more important than your individual well-being and that you should surrender your individual identity at the gates of your organisation and perform only as a member of your team (Ramesh, 2010, p. 49). He further writes on the benefits achieved in working in a team. He ascertains, that effective individual-group bonding is a two-way street, where the individual not only contributes immensely to the group's collective goals, but also derives an extra dose of strength and motivation from the group to achieve personal excellence. Commitment, on the other hand, towards work and organisation as an essential soft skill must be possessed by each employee. Makkar writes, that the employee needs to acquire the requisite technical, managerial, administrative and interpersonal skills to fulfil his/her commitment towards the task. In addition to these, value creation requires commitment towards the organisation, which demands the employee to respect the organisation's vision, mission and goals and also, understand the role of the organisation towards the society and the nation (Makkar, 2012, p. 20). The ability of commitment among the employees can be borne by communicating both formally and informally and making them aware of the vision and mission statements and how the company is committed is thriving towards achieving its goals. The company's success is directly reflected on the employees' success and vice-versa. This generates loyalty towards the task and the organisation and thus a commitment towards delivering better

performances is accomplished.

Soft skills like self-awareness and strong communication abilities, flexibility, practising workplace attitudes and adopting skills to succeed in the workplace and many more sustain the advantage of looking into problems and finding the solutions thus creating better work atmosphere and encouraging well-being of the employees and organisations. Interpersonal skills as one of the important aspects of soft skills have a predominant significance at workplace. Much of the business success depends on how employees frame their attitudes and compatibility with their co-employees. The significance of the interpersonal skills in professional field matters the most. Krizan asserts that interpersonal communication is a cornerstone in what social scientists refer to as the communication climate- the quality of the personal relationships that exist within an organisation. These relationships are directly influenced by the soft skills of the people within the organisation. The communication climate reflects the workers' perceptions of whether the organisation trusts, respects, and values them-factors related to job satisfaction and commitment. (Krizan, 2011, p. 407)

Workplaces are competitive atmospheres where every day a considerable amount of information is exchanged with large number of people. Hence, justifying one's efforts and results to various people who are responsible for something or the other can be somewhat frustrating. Chambers claims that among the root causes of today's most visible and impacting problems and failures is poor communication. He further speaks about improving communication skills especially scientific and technical professionals who need to communicate with various kinds of people from varied backgrounds. He in fact also provides tips to polish one's communication ability. Chambers says, "As you sharpen your communication abilities, hopefully others will follow suit (...)" (Chambers, 2001, p.6-7).

Another key factor of soft skills highly essential to bring about stability in organisation is how high a degree of emotional intelligence one carries. Interactions in organisations involve so many negotiations, team work, management and leading, with many people. A tipped communication or even a single negligence towards the emotions of other employees brings down communication and relationships fail. Remaining emotionally intelligent especially in the workplace not only benefits the concerned individual person but also others who are associated with the one. Weisinger asserts, that the key to making these relationships and interactions successful so that they benefit all concerned-not the least, you-is emotional intelligence. How you put your emotional intelligence to work is by recognising and responding to the

emotions and feelings of others, guiding those emotions toward productive resolution of a situation, and using those emotions to help others help themselves (Weisinger, 2000, p. 105).

Hence, an inference can be drawn that soft skills carry abundant importance in the work field. Klaus's famous quote, "Soft skills get little respect but they either make or break your career" (Andriotis, 2018), is often used as an introduction while imparting education on soft skills around the globe. Because the relevance of soft skills is viewed as indispensable factor towards career prospective today, many technical institutes have included soft skills into their academic syllabus. So that students get acquainted with not only the study of the hard skills but also the soft skills which will further help them in executing long term goals in their future successfully. Having covered the introduction section, the chapter now studies in details selected aspects of soft skills that are essential for career growth and success.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Career success is highly communication bound as workplaces as communication is the life blood of every organisation (Sethi, 2010, p. 50). The higher authorities execute daily transaction of work with the subordinates through communication. The subordinates get clarification on their work with their seniors through communication. Globalization has made the organisations merge together, expand and also contribute in the advancement of technology. The severity in the competition everywhere has brought a remarkable contribution in communication transmission. However, when communication is the life blood of an organisation, its employees are the transmitters and a long list of tasks like handling situations, motivating in need, supporting and persuading inspiring and acknowledging, planning and organising and achieving and accomplishing goals are all done through communication. A simple misapplication of communication in any way or format can hamper daily work activities and strain workplace relationships which may cause relentless impact on career growth and success. Communication requires a skilled ability to receive and send messages in a suitable manner consummating the receiver's propositions, without hampering self-rights and obligations, hence paving a two way path for exchange of information (Tripathy, 2018, p. 226). While much of the communication as an aspect of soft skills includes speaking, the other forms of communication like listening, reading, and writing too are of fundamental importance.

Besides, communication transferred through non-verbal communication is

also very important. Non-verbal codes are however very delicate and should be posed very attentively as they embody lot of meaning information even without using words. Its realm is vast and fascinating. Interestingly, much of the communication i.e. about two-third of the total communication in career success is executed through non-verbal communication which uses wordless message to convey information. Every day communication is associated with numerous facial expressions, gestures, postures and other forms of nonverbal communication that include maintaining distance, managing time, eye movements, tone or voice and many more in fact deliver a code or an activity. Griffin provides a befitting example as he elucidates the importance of facial expression. He exemplifies that giving an employee good news about a reward with the wrong nonverbal cues can destroy the reinforcement value of the reward. Likewise, reprimanding an employee but providing inconsistent nonverbal cues can limit the effectiveness of the sanctions (Griffin, 2007, p. 370). It is therefore required to communicate well and in an appropriate manner.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Although aptitude, cognition has been an integral part of one's personality, however, the intelligence linked with emotion has much to do with broader aspects for career success like teamwork, leadership and many more. Hence, it is required that one has the ability to identify his/her own emotion and follow it. Also, this ability facilitates identifying and understanding others' emotions as well. Although coined by Mayor and Salovey, it was popularized by Daniel Goleman in his book EQ: Why It can Matter more than IQ and since then a number of researchers, authors and practitioners have used the fundamental aspect of emotional intelligence and made deep studies like Lupton defines emotional intelligence as the ability to be aware of, manage, and control your emotions, and to use that ability to work and empathize with others. This is crucial for all types of relationships, from personal to professional (Caramella, 2018).

Emotions are in fact the significant categories of data messages and information that are a must during making decisions, team building, leading, negotiating, managing conflicts and so on. Emotions are the basic thoughts that influence one's ability to react or response and make one more empathetic towards people and situations and by developing our emotional intelligence we can become more productive and successful at what we do and how we interact with others, and even help others to be more productive and successful too (Wharam, 2009, p. 11). Developing emotional intelligence especially at workplaces and with a purpose to develop career require much attempts and efforts. The base of emotional intelligence includes two set of skills sets that is

persona and social and that is again based on awareness and management. At the personal level, emotional intelligence discusses self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation- focused on you and how well you know yourself (Sallie-Dosunmu, 2016, p. 1) and social competence that is your ability to understand other people's moods, behaviour, and motives in order to improve the quality of your relationships (p. 2). Emotional intelligence carries the following steps like self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills where the process begins with self-awareness that further leads to regulation of the emotions, motivating and feeling about others and finally developing social competencies. These steps are co-related and dependent to each other.

Inevitably, during the process of career growth and development, one has to work with various kinds of projects, products, people, clients, and other external agencies as well, all with varied personalities and with varied work cultures. Hence, one has to deal with various situations, people, adapt with the innumerable emotions and so on. This develops only through adapting emotional intelligence that assists in career advancement.

TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Managing time has become one of most important soft skills for career success and advancement. One needs to accept, grow and go with it. There is so much to do at work like meeting deadlines, achieving targets, delivering results, finish assignments, all within a time period. Hence, one has to manage time to create competence and efficacy in a way that maximizes profit and minimizes stress and frustration and makes achieve targets more easily. In order to make a career growth, one has to sincerely make growth happen. Good, effective time management is a core skill, a career skill that we all need both to make us able to perform in a current job and to enhance our career prospects (Forsyth, 2007, p. vi). Time management involves some great techniques that enable one to utilize time effectively and perform well in career success. Tracy surmises that knowing the value of something facilitates good time managing capability. He provides example of the executives who experience stress and get annoyed with the work given to them or with their performance. However, there are executives of other kind who put their whole heart into their work because it is a reflection of their values, seldom experience stress or burn out of any kind (Tracy, 2014, p. 11). With values, there emerges an intention and that keeps the employees motivated; there is a continuous flow of energy, activeness, eagerness and innovation in doing work and the work flows automatically within the time

frame.

Effective time management enables employees to make good decisions and increase job satisfaction. Hence in order to practice good time management skills and to experience paramount adequacy during career growth business organizations strictly emphasize on effective time management ability that is a way to develop and use processes and tools for maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. It involves mastery of a set of skills like setting goals, planning. And also, its effective use of time to achieve desired results (Downs, 2008, p. 29). The main objective of time management is to enable an individual in remaining absorbed on the activities that are important first and that matter more than other things or activities thus helping an individual being aware of how to use time as one resource in organising, prioritizing, and succeeding in a business in the context of all the competing activities of start-ups and new ventures (Marvel, 2012, p. 450).

STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Stressors are inevitable aspects of everyone's life. However, dealing with stress and attempting to reduce it is always one's choice and efforts. Workplace stress is the major issues for concern that not only affect individual's mental, physical, and emotional being but also creates adverse impact on the organisation as a whole. Hence, stress needs a proper management before actually stress manages things and situations around. Stress management is in fact a skill set or a technique imperative for career success. However, Tripathy affirms that approaches should be made not towards stress management that is temporary rather towards sources that cause stress and that would permanently control stress and enjoy benefits (Tripathy, 2018, p. 625). Hence, identifying stressors and working towards it can help in maximum outcomes. However, it depends on an individual whether to avoid, alter, adapt or accept. Individuals can decide on to prevent stressors, change stress-causing situations, acclimatize to stress scenarios and change expectations of them or embrace situations without trying to change and take on more stress. These four strategies to stress management are the most powerful techniques an individual must experiment in order to get relief from stress thereby causing less or negative impact on one's career.

All these qualities are competencies that enable an individual to go ahead in their career and job satisfaction. The list of soft skills is many and each one of the skill sets works as wonders by creating a positive impact.

CONCLUSION

Soft skills are the most essential requirement any individual can develop within themselves. Besides, soft skills help maintaining professionalism among employees and lend a hand in building better relationships with everyone. The contribution of soft skills in developing career and job satisfaction at workplaces are many and numerous authors, job experts rely on the fact that the absence of soft skills in the field of job opportunities and career advancement locates an individual nowhere. The significance of soft skills in the field of job opportunities and workplace scenario is crucial as it plays proactively in proving that emotions and behaviour become indispensable in building relationships and fine-tuning character and personality. An individual with good personality grows well in his/her career and does great work thereby bringing social change. Social change includes an individual's commitment towards self and welfare of the society thus determining self and society's needs for mutual well-being and development. It is the responsibility of the individual to transform a society and blend it with new hopes and aspirations for its betterment. Soft skills do just that.

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