



A Study on the Perception of Management Students About the Soft Skills Training Program in Sfgc, Bangalore

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ABSTRACT

Soft skills training is conducted to enhance and increase the performance level of a student to develop 'people skills' to meet the current as well as future needs of industry and businesses, to enhance employability, to ensure effective utilization of available resources and integrate personal goals, which results in productivity improvement, greater workforce

flexibility, savings on resources and principal costs, more motivated workforce and improved quality. Training and development are extremely crucial to the employees, the organisation and their effectiveness. Training evaluation has been the main focus of many studies in the last decade. It is now a well-established fact that employers are increasingly putting more emphasis on soft skills, it is equally important that students should also adequately appreciate the value of such skills and make deliberate efforts to acquire them. The business students' attitude towards behavioural courses, with substantial coverage given to soft skills development, is usually negative together with their reluctance to register for such courses. As a result, there is an awareness gap resulting in deficiency of soft skills among business graduates entering the work force. Consequently, there is now more pressure on academic institutions to enhance soft skills of their students through structured training programs.

The literature review suggests that a majority of the studies on this topic have been done from employers' perspective and only a limited number of studies have focused on the perceptions and attitudes of students towards soft skills. In addition, a higher percentage of such studies were conducted in North America and Europe with different learning environment and work culture than in many Asian countries. It is, therefore, worth exploring students' perceptions of soft skills from a new context.

This paper focuses on the perceptions of business management students of the importance of soft skills for their education and employment. Some areas covered by this study were: students' perceptions of the value of soft skills training, participation in skill development programs and the role of academic institutions in developing soft skills.

KEYWORDS : Soft Skills Training, Education, Employability, Skill Development

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills refer to personalities, attributes, qualities and personal behaviour of individuals. Soft skills include certain abilities such as communication, problem-solving, self-motivation, decision-making and time management skills. Due to a variety of factors, today's business environment is becoming more complex, uncertain and competitive. All types of organizations consider human resources as their key asset, which plays a critical role in organizational performance and success. Most employers are likely to hire, retain and promote persons who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, having effective communication, self-directed, willing to work and learn, and having positive attitude. Employers usually prefer to see a fine blend of competencies in their staff and, in addition to discipline-based knowledge and skills, adequate levels of soft skills are considered desirable for moving forward in the career. They feel professional and technical skills alone cannot help achieve organizational goals and objectives. It is because their staff will also be involved in different levels of leadership and decision-making activities. Employees also need to communicate effectively within the organization, with their customers and other stakeholders. Knowledge based economy is structured and developed with economic agents holding multi-qualified capacities, with broad and supplementary skills to effectively solve everyday problems, capable of enhancing their creativity, as well as aligning with the creativity of peers, group and organization. Thus, the individual needs autonomy and values such as sociability, conscience, freedom, holism and intent in order to fulfill a professional activity. Therefore, all these variables lead to the development of personal and organizational performance. Though not sufficient, this is the environment required to establish the ground for human talent, for creativity and for economic and social dynamism. Soft Skill training impacts critical areas of business, with productivity and quality topping the list. The training helps employees close skill gaps and build confidence that impacts performance. Soft Skills learning impacts performance because it integrates easily into the flow of work and is immediately applicable. Soft Skill solutions are designed by companies to support performance, close skill gaps and build confidence that is essential for employee performance.

Soft skills training is conducted to enhance and increase the performance level of a student to develop 'people skills' to meet the current as well as future needs of industry and businesses, to enhance employability, to ensure effective utilization of available resources and integrate personal goals, which results in productivity improvement, greater workforce flexibility, savings on resources and principal costs, more motivated workforce and improved quality. Training and development are extremely crucial to the employees, the organisation and their effectiveness. Training evaluation has been the main focus of many studies in the last decade. Over the years, researchers have developed systematic procedures for training evaluation. Some of them are presented here:

1. Kirkpatrick's four level model
2. Hamlin's five level model
3. Warr's framework for evaluation
4. Virmani and Premila's model of evaluation
5. Peter Bramely's model of evaluation
6. David Reay's approach to evaluation
7. Aima Zhang's peer evaluation model

It is now a well-established fact that employers are increasingly putting more emphasis on soft skills, it is equally important that students should also adequately appreciate the value of such skills and make deliberate efforts to acquire them. Porter reported that many business students do not put much value to developing soft skills. The business students' attitude towards behavioural courses, with substantial coverage given to soft skills development, is usually negative together with their reluctance to register for such courses. As a result, there is an awareness gap resulting in deficiency of soft skills among business graduates entering the work force. Consequently, there is now more pressure on academic institutions to enhance soft skills of their students through structured training programs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature to be reviewed encompasses all the material available in this field of study. For this study various sources such as books, articles, journals, research papers, e-resources, newspapers and magazines are reviewed.

According to a research study presented by Periera, Orlando P. ("Soft Skills: From University to the work environment, Analysis of a survey of graduates in Portugal", 2013), In a knowledge based economy, soft skills facilitates pro-active and entrepreneurial behaviors. Once they provide answers to complex questions, the academic curriculum should highlight a diversity of skills in graduates to build an open and flexible mind to uncertain and volatile market imperatives. In this article, graduates' opinion on university acquired soft skills and those which are actually applied in organizational context were compared. Results demonstrated a significant difference in perception, which revealed a structural maladjustment in the interaction between universities and enterprises.

According to a research article presented by S.Ezhilan and Dr.M.Renuka ("Soft Skills Training Program: Evaluation of Engineering Students Expectations and Experience", 2013), the literature review highlighted that the effectiveness of a training program can be fairly measured by comparing the pre-training expectations and knowledge of students with their post-training

experience. The study proposed to test whether the efficiency gap is subjected by the social background, gender and English language skills of the students.

According to the study conducted by Shaheen Majid, Zhang Liming, Shen Tong, Siti Raihana ("Importance of Soft Skills for Education and Career Success", 2012), Appropriate soft skills play an important role in a successful career as well as during social interactions in the society. The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills for their education and employment. A questionnaire was used for data collection and 188 undergraduate business management students from four universities in Singapore participated in this study. It was found that a majority of the respondents felt that soft skills were useful for social interaction as well as for career advancement. However, they did not think that these skills contribute considerably to their academic performance.

According to the research study conducted by Dr. A.O. Aworanti ("Integration of Soft Skills Assessment into public examining in Technical and Vocational Education", 2012), As employee performance is at the core of organizational goal attainment and considering the role of soft skills therein, assessment of soft skills in public examinations needs to be therein integrated. This study thus examined how such soft skills could be integrated into public examining system. A sample of 500 graduates of tertiary institutions working in government and private organizations in Benin City were used. An instrument was designed by the researcher and administered on the subjects. The resulting data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The inclusion of soft skills in the school curriculum for implementation by the school system was suggested. The role of examining bodies in its actualization through a model for their assessments was also presented.

According to Latika Sahni who conducted a study ("The Impact of Soft Skill Training Induction Programme on New Entrants," 2011) which describes the relevance of MDP programs even for the students pursuing professional courses. There has been a competitive paradigm shift in the demands of the corporate world. The corporate world has recognised that in order to gain a competitive edge or advantage over the competitors, the employees will have to acquire the skills which help them to sustain in the job, perform effectively and build positive relations with colleagues and customers. In India, the recruitment agencies report that there is a scarcity of 'employability skills' in young freshers. A huge number of graduates passing from Government and Private colleges cannot fill the void of right candidates. The growth of the Indian talent pool has been seriously constrained due to lack of soft skills. The professional institutes are more focused on academic development, where emphasis is restricted to knowledge only whereas they should stress on soft skill acquisition, practical training, and corporate simulation in the classrooms.

Dr.K.Alex in his book ("Soft Skills: Know yourself and know the world", 2009), has indicated about various areas of soft skills that is important for individuals. Soft skills play a significant role in one's success in life, particularly in one's profession. Soft skills in the highly competitive corporate world will help job incumbents to stand out

in a crowd. The ever changing impact of technology and the style of management pay so much attention to soft skills. With the boom in outsourcing in India, soft skills have become absolutely essential for the success of organizations and individuals.

The literature review suggests that a majority of the studies on this topic have been done from employers' perspective and only a limited number of studies have focused on the perceptions and attitudes of students towards soft skills. In addition, a higher percentage of such studies were conducted in North America and Europe with different learning environment and work culture than in many Asian countries. It is, therefore, worth exploring students' perceptions of soft skills from a new angle and context. The main objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of business management students of the importance of soft skills for their education and employment. Some areas covered by this study were: students' perceptions of the value of soft skills training, participation in skill development programs and the role of academic institutions in developing soft skills.

Given the expectations from the Industry, several interesting questions arise:

- What is the perception of students of Soft Skill training in SFGC, Bangalore?
- What is the curriculum adopted in soft skills training in the Institution?
- What could the measures adapted by Educational Institutions in imparting soft skills to Students?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the perception of students of Soft Skills training in SFGC, Bangalore
- To analyse and evaluate the soft skills program in S.F.G.C, Bangalore.
- To recommend and suggest suitable measures for effective implementation of soft skills training program in educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data for the study was obtained through questionnaires and interviews, wherein, student response was elicited. Secondary Data was obtained from books, research papers, magazines, journals, newspapers, e-resources.

Scope of the Study: The respondents selected were Business Management Graduates in SFGC, Bangalore. This study focused on the perceptions of business management students of the importance of soft skills for their education and employment. Some areas covered by this study were: students' perceptions of the value of soft skills training, participation in skill development programs and the role of academic institutions in developing soft skills.

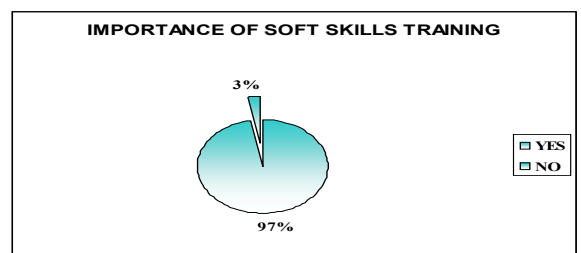
Sampling Technique: Stratified Random Sampling method was used for selecting the sample for the study.

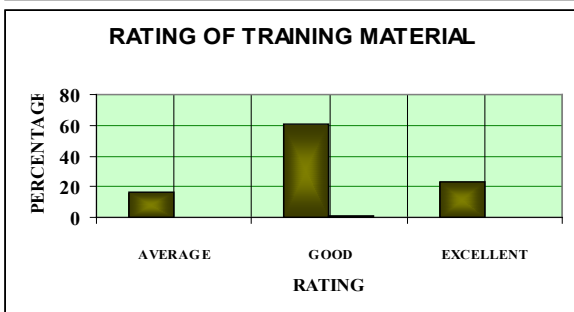
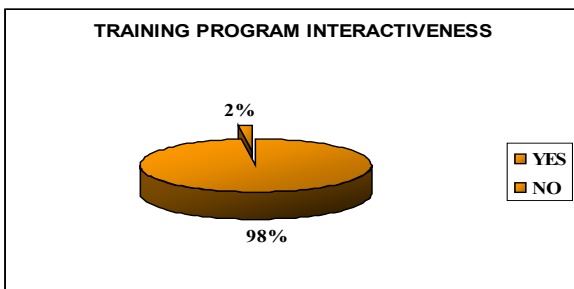
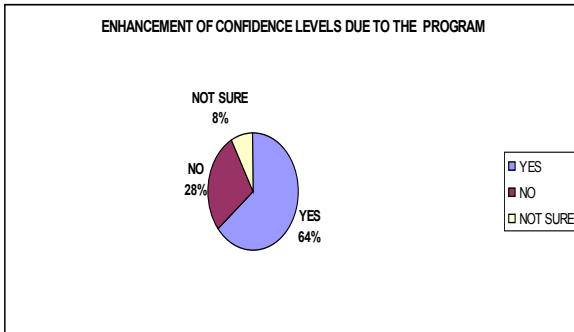
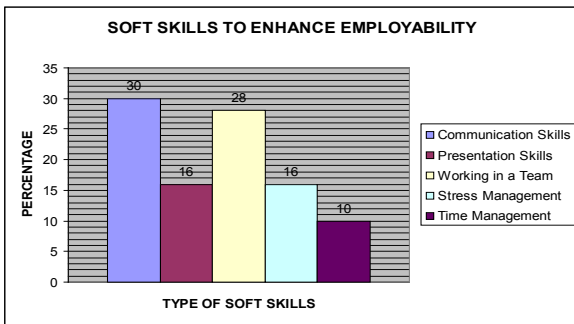
Sample Size: A sample of 50 trainees (Business Management Graduates) in SFGC, Bangalore was taken as a representative for conducting the study.

Plan of Analysis: The primary data collected from respondents was evaluated and percentages calculated to estimate the proportion of the response for different aspects under consideration in the study.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Perception of Students about the Training Program





Based on the survey conducted and feedback obtained from the students, the following findings are reported as follows:

- Among the total respondents, majority (97 %) felt that soft skills training is **important** in today's job context.
- Among the total respondents, majority (30 %) rated **communication skill** as the most critical skill to acquire to enhance employability.
- Among the total respondents, majority (64 %) indicated that their **confidence levels** has enhanced after undergoing the training program.
- Among the total respondents, majority (35 %) of them would like to have training in soft skills for **one week** before joining industry.
- Among the total respondents, majority (98 %) have indicated that the training program was **interactive**.
- Among the total respondents, majority (57 %) preferred **class room setting** for undergoing training in soft skills.
- Among the total respondents, majority (76 %) rated the **trainer** as good.
- Among the total respondents, majority (60 %) rated the **training material** as good.

- Among the total respondents, majority (68 %) have indicated that there is **improvement** in personal life.

Based on the feedback obtained the soft skills which are popular among the students (Critical to acquire before joining the industry) in the order of their importance are as follows:

1. Communication skills.
2. Working in Teams.
3. Presentation skills.
4. Stress Management.
5. Time Management

SUGGESTIONS

- Educational Institutions should formulate specialized training program in the area of soft skills by taking inputs from the Industry.
- Proper training and adequate opportunities to practice are likely to improve communication skills in students.
- Students recommended that more soft skills development activities should be incorporated in the curriculum.
- Assessment and certification of soft skills gives the students an edge over the competition in the recruitment process.
- Universities and Academic institutions should develop instruments to measure soft skills required in students.
- Periodic Workshops should be conducted in the area of soft skills in academic institutions to increase the awareness levels among the student community.
- Relevant Textbooks and Instructional materials in soft skills education should be developed.
- E-learning, teleconferences and webinars can also be used. (E – Soft Skills Training) to impart knowledge in the area of soft skills to students.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of the importance for education and employment. The results of the study revealed that student's competency and employability require the acquisition of soft skills which has to be integrated into the current academic courses. It was also found that communication skills were perceived to be the most important skill to be acquired. There is a greater need on the part of academic institutions to create awareness about soft skills learning among the student community. Relevant Instructional materials in soft skills education should be developed by academicians by taking the input of industry. Another related finding was that a majority of the students expressed the opinion that soft skills development activities should be incorporated in the curriculum. It is also imperative that students should also make efforts for improving their skill levels through active participation in skill development programs. To conclude, acquisition of Soft skills plays an important role in today's job context for a student. The development of 'soft skills' in this market is important when there is intense competition for many available positions. In view of the various challenges faced by students, training plays an important role to improve and develop inherent skills. In this context, training programs have to be formulated to be flexible and prepare them to face the challenges adequately. Soft skills are as important, if not more important, than traditional hard skills to an employer looking to hire - regardless of industry or job type. It thus goes without saying that if one does not have the necessary soft skills to go with his/her other qualifications; he/she might not be able to make it up the corporate ladder easily.

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