



Soft Skills: A Tool for Maximizing Productivity in Educational Institutes

KEYWORDS

Soft skills, teachers, students, educational institutes

Dr. Sna Farooqi

Assistant Professor, Dr. VN BRIMS, Thane

ABSTRACT *In this research paper we will discuss how development of soft skills among teachers and students of educational institutes plays an important role in increasing or maximizing the productivity. For human capital development five soft skills elements are considered to be important tool which comprises of communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, team work, lifelong learning and information management skills, and leadership skills. For overall students development following initiatives can be taken by the top management or teachers of educational institutes. Development of soft skills through stand-alone subject, development of soft skills by embedding it in existing courses, development of soft skills based on support programs, development of soft skills based on campus life.*

Introduction:

The development of human capital and the upgrading of the mentality and intellectual capacity of an Institute must be a priority if one needs to maximize the productivity of Educational institutes. Focusing on these areas will enable the Educational Institutes to raise its capacity for knowledge, creativity, and innovation, which are essential elements in order to increase productivity. It is equally important for students as well to have good level of soft skills as they carry the goodwill of their educational institute further. In this paper we will discuss a twofold model for the development of soft skills among teachers and students of educational institutes.

Meaning Soft Skills:

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people.

Importance of Soft Skills:

In order to achieve entrepreneurial success and for maximizing human capital in any enterprise soft skills like leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, negotiation, communication, creativity and presentation skills plays a very important role. In other words we can say person's soft skill is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organization.

We can also say, soft skills combined with efficient management team and an effective human resource management system, it can lead a way to get the highest return on the investment in terms of human capital. Good knowledge of soft skills becomes of extreme significance if you are dealing with a customer face to face.

In an interview with Economic Times the Prime Minister said India will be a developed nation by 2020 with an economic growth of 8%. But Professor Bala Balachandran of J L Kellogg Graduate School of Management said these are fine assertions but without soft a skill, that is relationship skills, this would remain a dream.

He further added that knowledge is not the only tool to get ahead in globalised economic scenario. Soft skill will provide an edge over the competition. Technology and skills alone don't make bottom line. It is people who do. How people in business or in offices behave with customers/clients, colleagues, how they inspire loyalty makes the crucial difference.

Review of Literature:

A recent study on 12,000 students by Birrell (2006) of Monash University in Australia showed that more than one-third of foreign students in Australian Universities, which includes 23.5% of Malaysian students, are not proficient enough in English, concluding that despite good work ethics these students are not equipped for professional level work. The study also indicated that while graduates had sufficient command of language in handling day-to-day situation, they were still incompetent to engage in an intellectual discussion which is essential in the demanding work force. Similarly a biannual survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters in the UK reported that there is an inadequate supply of applicants as they lack in "soft" skills (Association of Graduate Recruiters 2006).

Implementation of soft skills at Educational Institutes:

We have developed a framework suggesting the approach that should be undertaken in implementing soft skills. Thus, the Institute can adopt the proposed approach, although the implementation which is done at Faculty level varies with each Faculty dependent on the type of courses offered.

In order to maximize productivity in educational institutes here is a twofold model to describe the relevance and techniques of improving soft skills among both teachers and students.

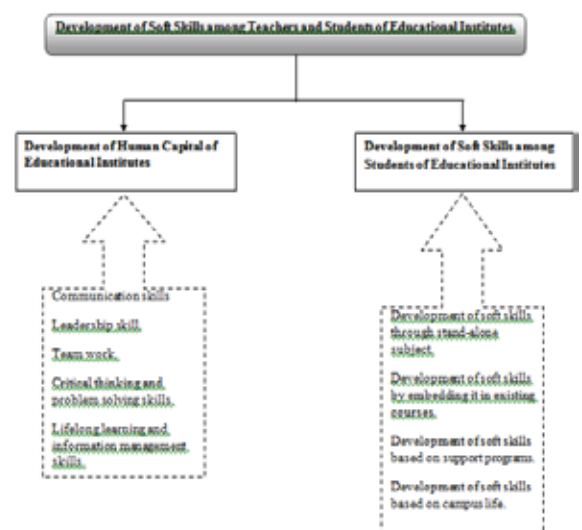


Figure: 1

Development of Human Capital of Educational Institutes: Communication skills

Teachers are expected to be fluent and able to communicate effectively. As teachers they should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. They are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. They should also be capable of giving and using technology during presentations confidently

Critical thinking and problem solving skills

With this skill, teachers should be able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge. Elements that teachers must possess under this aspect are the ability to identify and analyze complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable. They should also have the ability to expand and improve thinking skills, to provide ideas, and alternative solutions.

Team work

Team work skills involve the ability to work and cooperate with people from various social and cultural backgrounds so as to achieve a common goal. In order to build a good working relationship with his/her peers, it is essential that we are respectful toward others' attitude, behavior, and belief. From time to time teachers are also expected to undertake the role of a leader and a group member interchangeably.

Lifelong learning and information management skills

In acquiring skills and knowledge, teachers should be able to do self-regulated learning independently. They should have the skills to search for relevant information from various sources and able to manage them efficiently. They should also be receptive to new ideas and able to develop an inquiry mind.

Leadership skill

Leadership skill entails the ability to lead in various activities. Teachers should have the knowledge on basic leadership theories which will enable them to lead a project. It is also essential that teachers are able to understand the role of a leader and a group member and be able to carry out those roles interchangeably.

Development of Soft Skills among Students of Educational Institutes:

Development of soft skills through stand-alone subject

Faculties can offer stand-alone subjects which will provide students with the opportunity to develop soft skills on a formal basis. These courses which are offered as elective courses such as English (both written and oral), others can be offered as stand-alone subjects and can be taken up by the students in any semester.

Since the subjects are elective in nature, students may decline to register for these subjects, as they may have their own preference. In cases such as this, it is the teachers' role as student advisers to advise these students accordingly.

Development of soft skills by embedding it in existing courses

Soft skills can also be introduced at Educational Institutes by interweaving them with the current course content. This is probably one of the most practical ways in inculcating soft skills to students, as minimal or almost no changes need to be made to the current course structure. In this model, students develop soft skills throughout the full duration of their course, as some if not all of the skills are incorporated in the subjects taught. It is, however, the task of the department/faculty to identify which subjects can be embedded with the most and the least soft skill elements. As such, teachers should be heavily involved in the implementation aspect, while students need to be told how and in what aspect they will be assessed.

Development of soft skills based on support programs

Soft skills can also be developed indirectly through support programs such as co-curricular activities. Activities such as these are non-academic in nature, but indirectly assist students in developing their personality and character. These programs allow the students to explore their interest which can be nurtured by enrolling them in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that is reflective of their interest.

Development of soft skills based on campus life

A sizeable number of university students reside in residential colleges. The head of colleges could take this opportunity to plan activities that will involve the participation of all the students living in college residences. Activities such as debates, drama competition, sports carnival which includes tally match, charity bazaar, and singing competitions are amongst many activities that could be carried out. Besides increasing social interaction among students, leadership qualities, teamwork, and entrepreneurship can be nurtured through such activities. These informal activities should be carefully planned and carried out continuously throughout the semester, and to improve teamwork capabilities they should encompass all races and gender.

Conclusion:

Acknowledging the fact that these traits should be part of the students when they leave, their respective educational institutes, the lack of these skills amongst students is largely attributed to the education system that focuses on rote learning. Thus, students must be made aware of their shortcomings so that they are able to identify their weaknesses and limitations and take the opportunity to acquire as much good traits as possible while in institutes to prepare them for the demanding job market. The effort to enhance soft skills amongst students to prepare them for the globalized job market should be a joint effort between the students and teachers both. More importantly, students must be made to realize the importance of enhancing their soft skills so that they are able to compete in the world without boundaries. While suggestions on infusing soft skills have been deliberated by the educational institutes, the evaluation of these elements is left to the academics. At present, there are no clear guidelines on how to assess the level of soft skills amongst students although several faculties have adopted their own approach. Future research should thus focus on the appropriate assessment method to facilitate the effective implementation of soft skills development.

REFERENCE

- Ashton, F. (1994). The other managers' competencies. *Training Officer*, 30(1), 15-16. | • Association of Graduate Recruiters, UK. (2006). Graduate market remains buoyant but predicted salary rise lowest for five years. Press release February 7, 2006. | • Birrell, B. (2006). Implication of low English standards among overseas students at Australian Universities. *People and Place*, 14(4), 53-64. | • Career Opportunities News, 2002 | • Goswami A Urmi, (2003), "Customer relations important: Kellogg guru", *Economic Times*.