

Importance of English and Communication Skills for Technical Professionals



English

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ABSTRACT

Conventional Engineering curriculum is strongly focused on the development in students of technical knowledge and skills. However, in recent years, employers have increasingly acknowledged that this traditional preparation of engineering students is inadequate, as graduates lack the wide range of written and spoken communication skills required to engage with the members of other professional groups and with the broader community. This paper focuses on the need to recognize the important role that communicative competence plays in professional success within the engineering industry.

Introduction:

Engineering graduates require an ever-increasing range of skills to maintain relevance with the global environment of the new millennium. Communication skills are a vital component of this, recognized by academicians and industry alike, English language skills are also important given its widespread status across the globe as a *lingua franca*. Indeed, multilingual skills are considered a salient element in the make-up of the new global engineer. English for specific purposes focuses the learner's attention on the particular terminology and communication skills required in the international professional field. Lack of sufficient communication skills serves only to undermine the image of the engineer, but this can be tackled by engaging features of emotional intelligence (EQ) in the education of engineers.

Communication skills are essential for an engineer who aspires to carry out his/her professional practice in the global arena. Engineering communication skills basically constitute several core elements such as the fluency in the English language and the fundamentals of visual communication.

What is Communication ?

The term communication has been derived from the Greek word 'communicate', which means to share. All living beings communicate. It is an innate gift of nature by which living being exist, survive and grow in the environment. Mankind is unique among living beings who, in the process of evolution, has developed codes and instruments of communication. From the primitive drums to computer and internet means of communication are endless.

There is a system of language commonly owned, perceived and recognized for communication by the members of a speech community. For instance, the emergence of English as the sole language of computer and internet has enabled human mobility a matter of common experience in our daily life, and the world has reduced to a village.

Importance of Communication:

Communication is fundamental to all relationships. Poor communication is the most frequently cited cause of discontent within organisations and it would be reasonable to expect that most employers are seeking to appoint people with good communication skills. It is no surprise, then, that people often cite "excellent communication skills" as one of their key qualities on their CV.

Communication is an important facet of life. Communication skills are essential in all spheres of life. Be it an interview or dealing with the project leader or working out a solution with a team or writing a report, getting across the point effectively is what matters.

The success of an endeavour hinges on the ability to communicate effectively in today's fast paced life, everyone is asked to do more with less. In such a scenario effective communication holds the key. Effectively communication centres round the usage of words, speed of delivery of words, pitch modulation and body language. Using the right tools to communicate the right messages at the right time can salvage a crisis and motivate

people to work towards success. Truly said, communication works but for those who work at it. In the existing globalization scenario, most of the Information Technology, I.T Enabled Services, management institutes, public and private sector, multi-national Companies, Union Public Service Commission, and State Public Service Commission are in search for a right and suitable fresher for executive posts. Whatever be the recruiting criteria that I.T, ITES, industry giants had in their agenda, once this was clear, a first class degree would not serve the purpose, the candidate has to satisfy the skill sets that the companies are looking for.

People in organisations usually spend 75 percent of their daily time on communication through writing, reading, listening, speaking, inter-debate etc. Effective communication is an essential component for organisation success, whether it is in the interpersonal intra group organisation or external levels. A recent newspaper report said that of every hundred interviews, only five qualified for employability. It is not that they lacked in technical skills, but they lacked in communication skills. Communication skills are as important as technical qualifications for youngsters aiming at a bright career. Communications hold the key. Poor communication skills, low confidence levels and improper body language have bad results in the job race. The person recruited will have to deal with the global clients directly. The command over the language and accent neutralization also plays a vital role in the recruitment process.

Communication Skills for Engineers:

Evidences indicate that communication skills are what helped Homo sapiens evolve beyond our related ancestors, and that these skills have helped humankind develop into the advance societies of earth today. However, these skills have become stifled in the very discipline that has brought so many advancements, and that is engineering.

There is ample evidence that graduate engineers lack the required standard of communication skills, particularly when compared to the needs of industry internationally. The dean of Engineering at Duke University stated that ,

" Engineers who adept communications have a considerable advantage over those who do not...."

Furthermore, this lack of communication skills only serves to undermine the whole profile of a professional engineer.

Effects of Globalisation:

Globalisation directly influences industry's needs; a global engineer must be able to easily cross national and cultural boundaries. This in turn directly affects engineering education. A common code for communication is required. Those educational institutes, which meet the language requirements for the new global engineer, will be ready to face the new millennium. H P Jensen states that employers want:

".... a number of new competencies, with an emphasis on an increased ability to communicate..... and good foreign language skills. "

This is reinforced in N Gruwald's study of competences required by the engineer of tomorrow, which includes hard skills like good foreign language skills. He goes further to claim that cross-disciplinary language skills are not sufficiently taught. This indicates a lack of a direct fit between graduate skills and those required by the industry.

Engineers can relate the same theories of mathematics, of mechanics and technology, but the modern engineer must also be able to communicate effectively. This is more important as engineering projects are now planned and implemented across national and cultural borders. English has become the ascendant language internationally, being the wide spread. This will influence the language of communication between professionals internationally.

English has been widely accepted as the most widespread language in the world. It is cited as the major language of international business, diplomacy and science and professionals. It is the prime means of communication, and can often serve as the global language between two people from two different cultures, where in English is not the native tongue. For example, Swedish transport manufacturer Volvo, which has made English the language of managers at its new plant in South Korea, with English lessons being taken by some employees during production breaks.

Communication Skills for Engineers:

Engineers use communication skills to explain an idea, process, or technical design. They use written, oral, computers, graphics, and other engineering tools to communicate to other engineers and management.

Written communication includes technical writing of journal, texts, and other informational material. It includes specific, to-the-point details about a topic of mastery by the author. Other engineers use these texts for continued research and development because the knowledge gained by one engineer has been communicated to others.

Oral Communication includes the delivery of presentations, explaining a design or design process and many other details that improve meeting coordination and team development.

Graphical communication utilizes the visual senses and allows for the engineer to explain an idea without using detailed written reports and oral communication. Graphics is an extensive discipline that encompasses a large range of topics from rough preliminary sketches to detailed computer AutoCAD pictorials. Graphical and visual communication is crucial to all stages of the design process.

Issues in Engineering Education:

Three sources of weakness that can significantly impact on an engineer's communication skills education are

- Attitude of students to communication
- Insufficient course content
- Deficient or inappropriate Teaching methods

Another significant element included the lack of opportunity for engineering students to be able to practise communication skills particularly the oral component.

Conclusion:

People in organisations usually spend 75 percent of their daily time on communication through writing, reading, listening, speaking, inter-debate etc. Effective communication is an essential component for organisation success, whether it is in the interpersonal intra group organisation or external levels. A recent newspaper report said that of every hundred interviews, only five qualified for employability. It is not that they lacked in technical skills, but they lacked in communication skills. Communication skills are as important as technical qualifications for youngsters aiming at a bright career. Communications hold the key. Poor communication skills, low confidence levels and improper body language have bad results in the job race. The person recruited will have to deal with the global clients directly. The command over the language and accent neutralization also plays a vital role in the recruitment process.

It is high time to accept the importance and necessity of possessing good communication skills with a professional degree. Universities need to ponder over the issue and make suitable and appropriate changes in their curriculum. Teachers should take this as a challenge and convince students to work.

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