Soft Skills Training in the B.P.O Industry

SANTHOSH KUMAR A.V.	Research Scholar, Research and Development Centre, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore - 641014
Dr. MAHESH KUMAR.K.R.	Research Supervisor, Research and Development Centre, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore -641014

ABSTRACT

Soft skills form an important component among the various skills to be acquired by an employee in an organization. It is important for an employee to have a well-rounded personality to perform effectively on his\her job. For as long as one is dealing, interacting, reacting with other human beings, the importance of soft skills cannot be overlooked. The Term "soft skills" refers to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees. Soft skills are essentially people skills.

Globalization has increased the pressure on companies, with an increasing need felt to effectively manage oneself properly and also manage clients. Due to cross cultural differences working with people of varied cultures, interaction(language differences, varied accents, corporate etiquette) differs from culture to culture.So,In this context, there has to be more focus on gaining soft skills with the appropriate training tools. In India, the demand for soft skills is symbolic of the transition from an 'industrial orientation' to a 'service-based economy', particularly in the B.P.O.sector.In view of this transition, Soft skills can become a differentiating factor in providing value addition for servicing clients. Hence soft skills are critical for success at work in a highly competitive job market.

This paper focuses on various techniques and tools of imparting soft skills and also impact of soft skill training on employee development in the B.P.O.Industry.This Study focuses on Soft Skills (Transition) Training given by leading Organisations in the B.P.O.Sector. This Paper brings out the importance of Soft skill development in employees which can become a differentiating factor in providing value addition for servicing clients and critical for success at work in a highly competitive job market.

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills form an important component among the various skills to be acquired by an employee in an organization. It is important for an employee to have a well-rounded personality to perform effectively on his\her job. For as long as one is dealing, interacting, reacting with other human beings, the importance of soft skills cannot be overlooked. Employees in organizations need to know as to the manner of behaving as individuals and in groups. Soft skills have become the new mantra for organizations and trainers. Despite the occasional emphasis on sensitivity towards overseas cultures and visitors, it has become important not only in dealing with foreign clients, but also domestic ones. Technical and logical mindset might be enough initially but as one grows higher in the organization, one's interaction dictates future success in the organization. There is enough empirical data that suggests that there is little correlation between academic performance and success in the corporate world. One has to deal with people on a regular basis. So, it is important to develop our soft skills and have a well rounded personality.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- The idea of outsourcing has its roots in the 'competitive advantage' theory propagated by **Adam Smith** in his book 'The Wealth of Nations' which was published in 1776. Over the years, the meaning of the term 'outsourcing' has undergone a sea-change. What started off as the shifting of manufacturing to countries providing cheap labour during the Industrial Revolution, has taken on a new connotation in today's scenario.

- According to an article in the (McKinsey Quarterly 2013) the BPO industry is worth $67 –80 billion. The market, according to them, is projected to grow by 30-40% annually over the next five years.

- The Term "soft skills" (Dinyar Dastoor, 2013) refers to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees. Soft skills are essentially people skills.

- Soft skills have become the new mantra for organizations and trainers. Despite the occasional emphasis on sensitivity towards overseas cultures and visitors, it has become important not only in dealing with foreign clients, but also domestic ones (P.Venkataramana, 2013).

- It is important to invest effort in perfecting soft skills to face everyday situations in not only the organization but also in our daily life. The development of 'soft skills' in the job market is important when there is intense competition for many available positions (www.hinduonnet.com).

- The term 'Soft Skills' (L.Shankari, 2014) is in itself, a conundrum of sorts, broadly referring to anything that is not technical, mathematical or involving heavy machinery. Soft also conjures up an image of passiveness and subtlety.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the various techniques and tools of imparting soft skills in the B.P.O.Industry.
- To analyse and evaluate the soft skill programs in B.P.O. Companies.
- To study the impact of soft skill training on employee development.

SOFT SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS IN THE BPO SECTOR

The Oracle **"Transition workshop"** will help participants to:
➢ Make a smooth transition into the oracle work culture.
➢ Settle down at work and contribute at an accelerated pace.
➢ Work effectively in teams.
➢ Transact customer business with responsiveness.

TRAINING PROGRAM
The program focuses on the following:
➢ Professionalism
➢ Corporate Etiquette
➢ Assertive Communication at work
➢ Business writing skills
➢ Telephone Management skills
➢ Personal Effectiveness
➢ Self Management-Basic skills
    1. Personal Health
    2. Achievement Motivation
    3. Task execution excellence
➢ Team working

Professionalism: It includes understanding about the term, standards of a professional, Knowledge, skills and attitude requirements and understanding about the role and responsibility of a professional.

Corporate Etiquette: It includes learning about Corporate dress sense, Core corporate attitude, accountability, proactiveness, Expectation and perception management and inculcating discipline.

Assertive communication at work: It includes learning communication at the workplace, benefits of assertiveness, verbal and non verbal indicators and applications.

Business writing skills: It includes basic e-mail etiquette, appropriate use of active and passive voice, about the e-mail dominated business world, sentence combining and paragraphs and being consistent in writing.

Telephone etiquette: It includes basic telephone etiquette, answering incoming calls, effective listening and speaking skills.

Personal Effectiveness: It includes learning about various leadership styles, health & stress, emotions, people and dimensions of personal effectiveness.

Self Management-Basic skills: It includes about aspects of emotional health (EQ), stress management, motivation, mental agility, prioritization of tasks and task execution.

Team working: It includes managing internal customer relationships, rapport building, conversation building, differences between a group and a team, team communication, conflict management skills, team meeting etiquette.

The program is a four day transition workshop which ends with a **'Team player style survey'** which identifies each trainee's style as a team player. The trainee is also given a **"learning summary and action plan format"** which is a means of feedback mechanism. It collects information as to what the trainee learned during the program and how he proposes to implement it at the workplace.

All the employees have to complete all the mandatory courses within one month from the date of joining.

Some of the important elements are:
• Ethical Leadership
• Total customer experience
• Environmental,Health,Safety and security
• Customer experience standards
• Standards of personal conduct
• HP Standards of excellence

Business writing skills: It includes learning to write a standard business letter, to give a professional tone to the letter, use of phrases, use of correct words and language.

Customer Orientation: It includes learning about customer expectations and experience. The critical deliverables are responsiveness, Turn around time and acknowledgement.

The keys to achieving critical deliverables are:
• First impression
• Empathy
• Apology
• Probe
• Personalization

Communication skills: It includes learning about process of communication and comprehension, types, mediums of communication and the impact of effective communication.

E-mail Etiquette: It includes learning about composition of an e-mail, writing a salutation, opening and closing of letters, using of positive tone and positive phrasing.

Leadership & Managerial programs: It is developed through Centers of Excellence, in consultation with expert trainers which drives home the point that an overall development of personality coupled with technical skills is a winning combination for HP employees.

The trainees are given **Pre-tests** and **Post-tests** as a feedback mechanism to assess the amount they have learned in all the areas of the training program. Success of HP depends upon a useful and vivid communication by HP in order to keep in touch with it's customers (internal & external) which is achieved by it's comprehensive training program.

From project planning to project delivery to personality skills, Training team delivers 32,000 man hours of training across the company. Each employee receives 8 days of mandatory training every year.

Voice & accent training: At the Entry-level, six to eight weeks of voice and accent training is mandatory for all the freshers before they go on the operations floor.

Cultural and process training: It is mandatory before the employee is placed on the floor to sensitize him to client's culture and behaviour.

Leadership programs: In order to help employees rise up the ranks there are several tailored programs, like a **Three**

week **Star Certification Program**, which have been developed specifically to prepare Team Leaders for real time scenarios and equip them with managerial ability.

Customer service: It includes learning about service quality dimensions, customer expectations, service triangle, moment of truth, call control format, call handling techniques, effective listening skills hold and transfer procedures and benchmarking.

Sales presentation: It includes learning about keys to an effective presentation, probing to uncover customer needs and handling transitional phrases effectively.

MphasiS conduct regular training programs in popular technical, soft-skills and management areas. All these are supported by a good training infrastructure in the company.

Behavioral Developmental Programs
Communication Workshops: Effective communication skills, values, roles, and personal skills required to provide effective individual and team communication are conducted in the program.

Cross Cultural Sensitization: To create awareness about cultural differences and build a solid foundation to develop understanding, flexibility and mutual respect to foster effective long-tem cultural cooperation. To understand cultural differences and to capitalize on the strengths of different cultures is stressed in cultural sensitization.

Creativity Approach: This is a **project specific program**, which helps in adopting a deliberate thinking process for problem solving, finding opportunities and stimulate innovation by focusing on the creative energy within the project team.

Building High Performance Team (BHPT): To help HR professionals and Project Managers create high performing teams through performance appraisal and feedback and review of their personal people-management style.

Personal Growth Lab (PGL): Aims at renewing the **"Self"** for Personal and Managerial Effectiveness through processes where individuals belonging to Organizations / Institutions rediscover and rejuvenate themselves. The target group is managers and above.

Employee Development Programs
The Company seeks to prepare young professionals to better negotiate the myriad challenges in a competitive and ever changing world.

Discover Basic Leadership Skills for frontline executives: To make executives aware of the different facets of leadership that go beyond a role and designation.

MphasiS Leadership Institute (MLI): To nurture world class leadership aimed at enhancing business results; MLI is a **5 day module** to ensure a smooth transition from a Sr. CSE to a Unit Manager.

Leadership Excellence & Advancement Program (LEAP): To help Unit Managers succeed in a more challenging role, so that efficiency is increased and skills for the next level of managers are nurtured.

Mentorship Programs: A group of professionals are invited to be part of a mentorship initiative taken up by the organization. This initiative is an integral part of strategy of providing holistic and integrated IT and BPO Solutions.MphasiS believe that as part of a people oriented business, their employees are the flag bearers of the company.
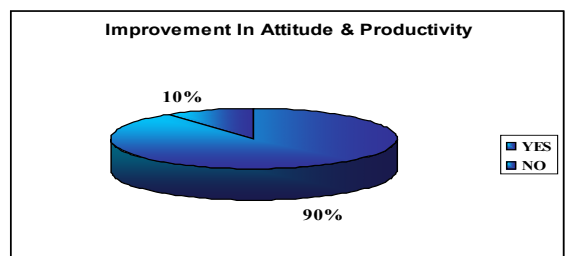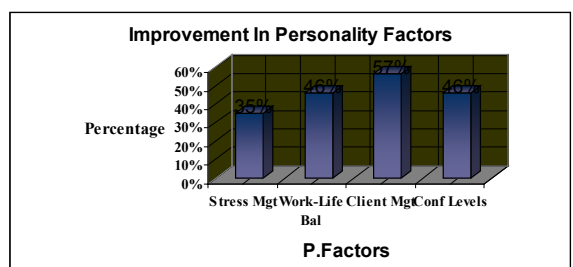
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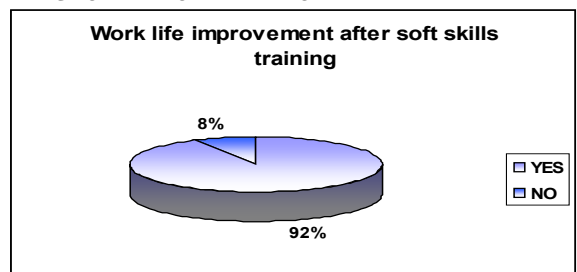
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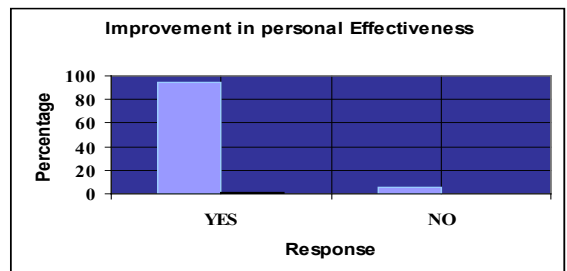
Source: www.softskillsworld.com

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Based on the feedback obtained from employees (Source: www.softskillsworld.com) the following findings are reported as follows:

- Among the total respondents, majority (92%) of respondents have indicated there is improvement in work and personal life.
- Among the total respondents, majority (94%) of respondents found improvement in their personal effectiveness in day to day interaction.
- Among the total respondents, majority (90%) of respondents found that there is improvement in their attitude and productivity.
- Among the total respondents, majority (57%) of respondents have found improvement in client management after training.

Based on the feedback obtained the soft skill courses which are popular in the B.P.O. industry in the order of their importance are as follows:

1. Communication skills.
2. Time Management.
3. Presentation skills.
4. Team Development.
5. Customer service.

CONCLUSION

The importance of soft skills cannot be overemphasized in an age where so much premium is put on interactivity and communication. The soft skills we gain will equip us to excel in professional and personal life. It is a continuous learning process.

To elaborate more on soft skills, these are the ones that define one's approach towards work, life, problems, etc. The best part about mastering them is that the application of these skills is not limited to one's profession, but their scope reaches all aspects of life. Technical skills may teach one how to meet the expectations of the job, but soft skills teach one to succeed, and to exceed expectations. Most of the business leaders observed that they could find workers who have "hard skills" i.e. the capability to operate machinery or fulfill other tasks, but many potential employees lack the soft skills. CEOs and human resource managers said they are ready to hire workers who demonstrate a high level of "soft skills" and then train them for the specific jobs available. The ever-changing impact of technology has given hard-skills-only workers a short shelf life.

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. In India, the demand for soft skills is symbolic of the transition from an 'industrial orientation' to a 'service-based economy', particularly in the B.P.O.sector.In view of this transition, Soft skills can become a differentiating factor in providing value addition for servicing clients.

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