

Study on the Nature of Impact of Soft Skills Training Programme on the Soft Skills Development of Management Students

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Abstract

The education as well as the market scenario is changing very fast. A decade ago, those individuals who had a brilliant academic record with added work experience were well sought after by most of the corporate institutions. But today hard skills and experience are not sufficient enough for the ingress and escalation in the corporate world. Employers prefer to hire and promote those persons who are resourceful, ethical, and self directed with good communication/ soft skills. Dearth of soft skills in the candidates has resulted in low hiring by corporate.

In spite of such great significance of soft skills, many management colleges are reluctant to incorporate soft skills training in the curriculum of management courses. This paper is based on an empirical study conducted between students regularly exposed to soft skills sessions and those who are deprived of the same.

Key words: Soft skills, Soft skills training programme.

Introduction

The education scenario in the recent times is changing very fast. No matter how well versed an individual think he is with respect to the technical skills he will not get success in the corporate world, if you cannot communicate well with your colleagues or clients". Communication skill is an important soft skills element and plays an important task in the business world.

Soft skills have become a crucial an increasingly sort after quality for careers in corporate world, irrespective of the sector. According to Serby Richard (2003) modern corporate requirements are such that they look specifically for those candidates who can add value to their organization with their soft skills and the ability to develop and use soft skills which can make the difference between a job offer and enjoyment of new employment. This requirement of soft skills in a job has made the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability tougher. All those candidates who wish to get an edge over their competitor are expected to refine their soft skills so that they will be able to emerge as a winner irrespective of the hurdles that they face in the recruitment process or during the tenure of

employment. This view point is substantiated by Hewitt Sean (2008) that, employers value soft skills because they are just as good as indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications. So today's professionals need to encompass a high soft skills quotient, apart from the domain knowledge in order to succeed in this competitive era.

For inculcating soft skills in today's management professionals, they have to be provided with trainings as a part of their professional curriculum. This in turn will help them to improve their complete personality and compatibility therefore enabling them to secure a respectable position in the corporate world.

Irrespective of the professional qualification and apart from the domain knowledge, today's professionals need to posses a high Soft Skills quotient in order to succeed in this competitive era. Hard skills contribute to only 15% of ones success while remaining 85% is made by soft skill (Watts M and Watts R. K, 2008). In spite of such great relevance of soft skills in the present corporate world some of the management colleges in Jaipur are yet to introduce soft skills in their curriculum.

This article intends to give an insight to these management colleges on the importance of incorporating soft skills in their curriculum, to ensure commendable placements. This paper is based on an empirical comparison conducted between the students regularly exposed to soft skills sessions and those not exposed to the same, with respect to their overall soft skills levels.

Definition

Soft skills are essentially people's skills or personality specific skills. According to Hewitt Sean (2008) soft skills are "non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills" which determines an individual's strength as "a leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator". Soft skills are the traits and abilities of attitude and behaviour rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude (Tobin, 2006).

The Center for Career Opportunities at Purdue University defines soft skills as "the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees." Their list of soft skills includes work ethic, courtesy, teamwork, self-discipline, self-confidence, conformity to prevailing norms, and language proficiency.

Soft skills are different and distinct from Hard Skills. Soft skills are those skills that add more value to the hard skills adorned by an individual. Martin Carole (2008) comments that hard skills are more "along the lines of what might appear on your resume" whereas soft skills are "cluster of personality traits, social graces, personal habits, friendliness and optimism." Soft skills are not a substitute for hard or technical skills, but they act as harmonizing skills that serve up to unlock the prospective for highly effective performance in people even with good hard skills.

Need of Developing Soft Skills and Research Evidences

Superior soft skills play a very important role in this vigorous commercial epoch. Today there is a huge mass

of qualified job seekers existing in the society and the competition within them for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming tougher. To get an edge over the competitors they are left with no other choice but to add worth to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. If one has got advanced soft skills then definitely he will be able to establish themselves as distinct amongst other management job seekers.

Concerning the importance of including soft skills in management colleges, Thacker and Yost (2002) noted that students require training to be effective team members. Employers often come across that "business graduates lack good team leadership skills". Similarly, according to Knell and et.al. (2007) employers are continually asking for a work force rich in creativity, communication skills and cultural understanding.

The National Employers Skills Survey 2003, reported that employers regard shortages in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills (Watkins, 2004).

Poor soft skills like communication skills create a negative impression with employers during the recruitment phase and may exclude a graduate with good technical skills from being selected for employment (Pauw and et al, 2006).

Soft Skills Training

Irrespective of the target group or the institution where it is imparted, soft skills training programmes aims to improve a whole range of skills, like assertiveness, negotiation skills, communication skills and the skill to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships.

Soft skills are perceived as those capabilities that are inherent in an individual. These competencies exist in every individual to a particular level. But if these skills are not used or if the individual who adorns these skills is unaware of it then that individual will never be able to utilize his / her inherent skills. The aim of any soft

skills training programme is to remove these blocks or the barriers that prevent the individual from utilizing his/ her skills. Soft skills training will make the individual aware of his / her hidden capabilities and to refine it for the overall development and success of the individual. Everyone can benefit from the soft skills training irrespective of the skills they have inherited.

The Study

This paper aims to find out the significant improvement that soft skills training can bring forth in the life of a management student. The nature of impact of soft skills training on management students was measured by comparing their soft skills levels before and after the intervention.

Objective

1. To find out the nature of impact of the soft skills training on the soft skills levels of management students.
2. To find out the major soft skills components that can be improved after the exposure to soft skills training.

Hypothesis 1. Soft skills training will significantly improve the soft skills of management students.

Research Design

The research design adopted for the study was 'post-test' experimental design with one control group.

For the study, the researchers segregated two groups' one experimental group and another control group. Experimental group was exposed to soft skills training (the independent variable), while the control group was exposed only to regular content related and management training. For the study, researchers selected only those students who were homogeneous with respect to certain demographic factors like education qualification, age group, gender, and economic background.

It is assumed in the study that all other extraneous variables like; parenting and environment in the college

make equal and similar impact on the students belonging to both control group and experimental group.

Universe

Out of Eighteen management colleges in Jaipur, 6 colleges have prescribed soft skills curriculum while remaining 12 colleges focuses more on analytical skills development with least emphasis on soft skills development. Experimental group was randomly selected from the 6 colleges that run soft skills courses and control group was selected from those 12 colleges that focus on analytical skill development. The research was conducted on students pursuing second semester MBA from management colleges in Jaipur (Rajasthan) within the age group of 21-24. They constituted the universe of the study.

Sample Size

The total sample size was 80. Forty students were included in the control group and 40 in the experimental group, using simple random sampling method.

Tools of Data Collection

Soft Skills of the students was measured using a soft skills scale used by employers. The scale consisted of 25 questions related to different soft skills components. It was a five-point scale. The scoring of the scale was done in such a way that the cumulative value of one individual's response to the scale will give the overall soft skills value of that respondent.

Objective of Soft Skills Training Programmes

The main objectives of the soft skills training imparted to MBA students were to:

- Develop effective communication skills (spoken and written).
- Build up effective presentation skills and equip them for effective business correspondence and prepare business reports.
- Develop inter-personal skills, team management skills, and leadership skills.

- Make the student competent with respect to the current Job requirements, by expanding the skills set of theirs.

The contents of the soft skills curriculum followed in the experimental group management colleges fulfilled the above objectives. It aimed to improve the self-awareness of the students and hence to develop their eagerness and enthusiasm to emerge as a winner irrespective of the difficulty of the situation.

Analysis Plan

The study assumes that both Experimental group and the Control group were homogeneous at the time of constitution and any significant differences found in the experimental group, compared to control group with respect to their soft skills is due to the impact of the soft skills training. The significance and the nature of impact will be calculated using paired samples't' test. SPSS 17 was used for the same. The outcomes of this analysis will prove or disprove hypothesis No.1. Researcher collected the data from both the experimental group and control group at the same point of time to avoid the influence of any extraneous variables like personality development sessions, placement related training, and maturity of the respondents.

Limitation of the Study

Limitation of the study was that the researchers were not able to impose equal control over both the experimental group and control group with respect to their overall life experiences, personality traits as well as the learning from daily classroom exposures.

Result and Discussion

Average soft skills value was inferred separately for the experimental group and control group.

First objective of the research was to find out the nature of impact of the soft skills training on the management students of the experimental group.

The impact of soft skills training was deliberated using the impact score, calculated as the difference between

the post-test scores found separately for the control and experimental group. 't' test was performed to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of control group and experimental group. The outcome of the't' test will prove or disprove the formulated hypotheses No 1.

Comparison of the soft skills scores of experimental and control group.

	Mean	SD	N	t	p
Experimental group	94.6	9.1	40	4.73**	0.00
Control group	85.3	8.3	40		
Impact score					

** : significant at 0.01 level

94.6 is the average soft skills of students in experimental group, similarly mean value 85.3 of control group shows that, on the average even control group members have got good soft skills value.

But a statistical analysis between the soft skills level of both the groups shows that experimental group members were having significantly higher soft skills compared to the control group , t value 4.7 significant at 0.01 level. (Table No.1).

This gives us the inference that by providing soft skills training, we can significantly improve soft skills of management students. It demonstrates that by providing soft skills training, management institutions can improve the employability of their students to a much higher levels. These results are positively related to the views and results of researchers such as Awe Jide, (2008); Serby Richard, (2003); S Thacker and Yost (2002). The above result proves hypothesis 1, that Soft skills training can significantly improve the soft skills of management students.

After proving the hypothesis, researchers tried to find out the major soft skills components that can be significantly improved using soft skills training.

Changes or improvement in soft skills components

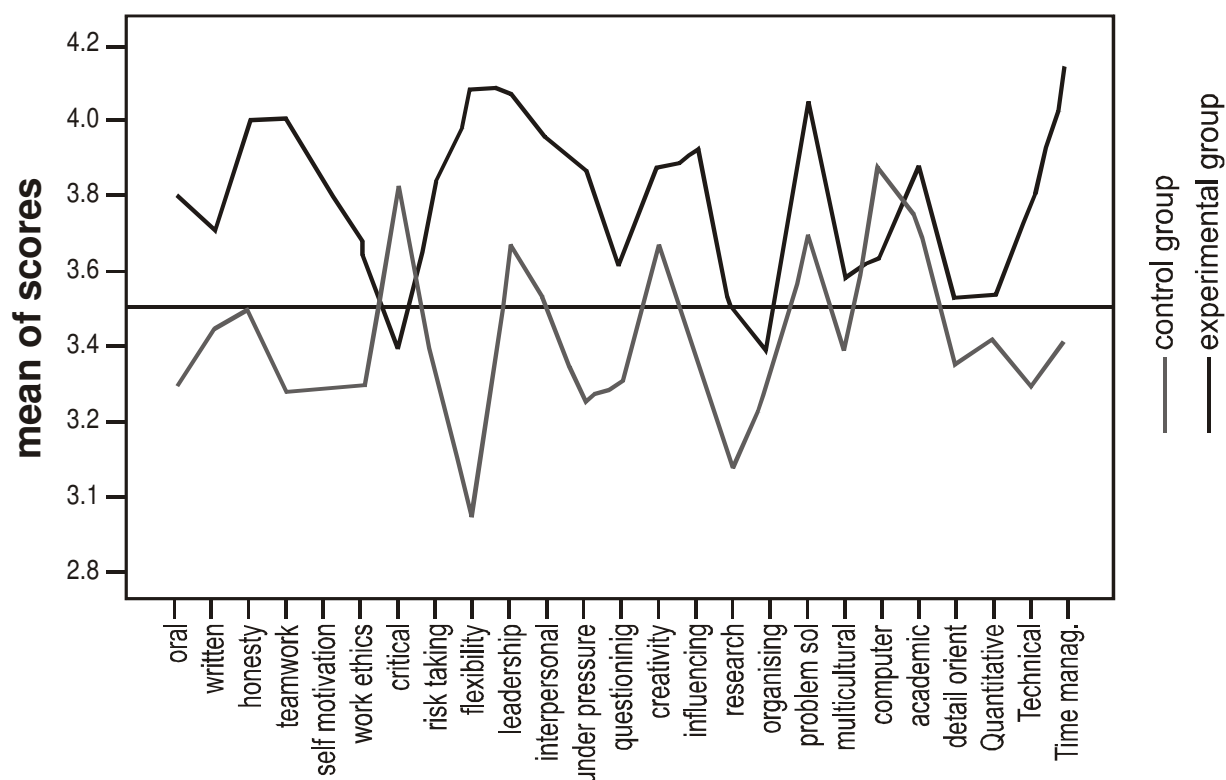
Soft skills components	Experimental group			Control group			t	Significance level
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N		
Oral/spoken skills	3.8	0.6	40	3.3	0.7	40	2.99**	0.005
Written communication	3.7	0.7	40	3.5	0.9	40	1.53	0.133
Honesty	4.0	0.9	40	3.5	0.7	40	2.56*	0.018
Teamwork	4.0	0.9	40	3.3	1.0	40	3.05**	0.004
Self motivation/ initiative	3.8	0.9	40	3.3	1.1	40	2.64*	0.012
Work ethic/ dependability	3.7	0.8	40	3.3	0.9	40	1.96	0.058
Critical thinking	3.8	0.8	40	3.4	1.1	40	2.11*	0.038
Risk taking skills	3.8	0.7	40	3.3	1.0	40	2.63*	0.012
Flexibility/adaptability	4.1	0.7	40	3.0	0.9	40	6.11**	0.000
Leadership skills	4.1	0.7	40	3.7	0.6	40	3.12**	0.003
Interpersonal skills	4.0	0.6	40	3.5	0.9	40	2.62*	0.012
Working under pressure	3.9	0.6	40	3.3	1.1	40	3.151**	0.003
Questioning skills	3.6	0.7	40	3.3	0.9	40	2.22 *	0.032
Creativity	3.9	0.8	40	3.7	1.0	40	1.071	0.291
Influencing skills	3.9	0.6	40	3.4	0.9	40	3.6**	0.001
Research skills	3.5	0.7	40	3.1	0.8	40	2.48*	0.018
Organization skills	3.4	0.8	40	3.3	0.8	40	0.45	0.653
Problem solving skills	4.1	0.7	40	3.7	0.6	40	2.27*	0.029
Multicultural skills	3.6	0.8	40	3.4	0.9	40	1.05	0.299
Computer skills	3.7	0.7	40	3.9	1.0	40	-1.27	0.212
Academic skills	3.9	0.7	40	3.7	0.8	40	1	0.323
Detail orientation	3.5	0.8	40	3.3	0.8	40	1	0.323
Quantitative skills	3.5	0.8	40	3.4	0.7	40	0.68	0.5
Teaching/ training skills	3.8	0.6	40	3.3	0.7	40	2.81**	0.008
Time management skills	4.2	0.7	40	3.4	0.9	40	4.13**	0.000

* : significant at 0.05 level ** : significant at 0.01 level

Table no. 2 reflects that students in experimental group were found to be significantly higher with respect to oral/ spoken skills, honesty, teamwork, risk-taking skills, working under pressure, influencing skills, training skills, and time management skills. The difference found between the experimental group and control group with respect to these soft skills components were found to be significant at 0.01 levels.

Similarly statistically significant difference at the level of 0.05 were found between the experimental group and control group with respect to soft skills components of self motivation, critical thinking, interpersonal skill, research skills and problem solving skills.

Soft skills of management students



Soft skills of Variables

From the above figure it is evident that management students who were exposed to soft skills training adorned above average score with respect to all parameters of soft skills. Assuming homogeneity of control group and experimental group with respect to the extraneous factors the above results are attributable as the outcome of the soft skills training undergone by the experimental group. This shows that soft skills training can bring about significant improvement in students with respect to almost all the major soft skills components.

Conclusion

Today, new generation managers are expected to adorn soft skills along with the technical/ hard skills. The modern corporate managers should have the ability to understand situations, fill in the missing conversations, ability to connect and coordinate, and should know

how to enlist the support from others. The ability to work in team and good interpersonal skills definitely add significance in the growth and promotion of corporate executive. The research results show that soft skills of the students can be refined if management colleges impart the adequately framed and standardized soft skills training sessions to them.

Paper proves that by regularly exposing students to soft skills training sessions, we can significantly enhance the soft skills of the students and in turn their employability.

Those students' who are regularly exposed to soft skills sessions will have an edge over other students not only with respect to employability but also with respect to overall personality development. This is predicted to be reflected whenever they will be facing interviews

for their placements and in their overall performance through out their life. Though technical skills are needed at the entry level for any manager it is his soft skills and conceptual skills that is going to help him/her in scaling the heights in career.

Thus this paper throws light on the need of the hour... i.e. management colleges need to wake up to reduce this lacunae that is existing in the students by introducing soft skills training programme as a part of their management curriculum.

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Annexure

- Oral/spoken communication skills: Both one-on-one and in groups (e.g., presentations). Do you just listen, or do you get invited to speak at gatherings?
☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent
- Written communication skills: Both printed and online written work, including reports, letters and email. Do you always use the phone, or has your work been published?
☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent
- Honesty: Being truthful and having integrity. Do you always tell people, "I never lie," or do your friends entrust you with their keys and money at parties?
☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent
- Teamwork/collaboration skills: Working with others to accomplish tasks. Do you think working

in groups wastes your time or encourages your best work?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

5. Self-motivation/initiative: Doing things without needing to be told or persuaded. Are your projects always due last week, or did your class project go public already?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

6. Work ethic/dependability: Being thorough and accurate so colleagues can count on you. Do you think someone else can fix it, or do your friends ask you to balance their checkbooks?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

7. Critical thinking: Challenging things when appropriate and proposing alternatives to consider. Do you think everything you see or hear is true, or do policymakers call you for advice?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

8. Risk-taking skills: Taking a considered chance on something new, different or unknown. Do you think taking risks is too risky, or do your friends earn great returns on your investment advice?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

9. Flexibility/adaptability: Going with the flow and adjusting with unforeseen circumstances. Do you keep the rulebook on your bedside table, or do your friends admire the way you handled both traffic court and the Royal Court?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

10. Leadership skills: Guiding and supporting others in order to accomplish something. Do you think leaders are megalomaniacs, or are you asked to

chair committee meetings?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

11. Interpersonal skills: Relating with other people and communicating with them in everyday interactions. Do you like to be alone, or do you aspire to be the next Oprah Winfrey or Jay Leno?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

12. Working under pressure: Handling the stress that accompanies deadlines and other limitations or constraints. Do you handle deadlines by ignoring them or by doing your most creative work under pressure?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

13. Questioning skills: Asking questions in order to learn or clarify something. Do you already know all the answers, or is your nickname Detective Colombo?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

14. Creativity: Having the imagination to come up with new or off-the-beaten-path ideas. Do think it's all been done before, or did you earn a patent and win an art prize in grade school?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

15. Influencing skills: Persuading others to think about or adopt a different point of view. Would you rather die than sell, or do you want the air conditioner franchise in Nome?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

16. Research skills: Gathering information in order to study or answer questions. Are your papers based on what you see on FOX News, or did you wear out your library card?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

17. Organization skills: Being organized and methodical, especially in work-related situations. Do you celebrate random actions all day every day, or did NASA ask you to help plan the Mars missions?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

18. Problem-solving skills: Analyzing the potential causes of a problem and coming up with a solution. Do people ask you to leave the problem to them or to help them find the solution?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

19. Multicultural skills: Understanding and relating to people who are different from you, perhaps by using a second language. Are all your friends just like you, or when someone says, "hello," do you need to think for a moment about what language to reply in?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

20. Computer skills: Using basic word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation software as well as the Internet. Do you always get someone to help you, or are you the one providing the help and advice?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

21. Academic/learning skills: Learning new things quickly and thoroughly, and being willing to learn continuously. Are you taking basic geology for the third time, or did you start taking post-grad courses sophomore year?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

22. Detail orientation: Making sure that even the little

things are done and done correctly. Do you specialize in big-picture thinking, or do your friends ask you to plan their weddings?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

23. Quantitative skills: Compiling and using numbers to study an issue or answer a question. "Numbers are for geeks," or "Metrics are my life"?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

24. Teaching/training skills: Showing other people how to do something in a way that allows them to learn quickly and thoroughly. Do you think everyone should figure things out for themselves, or do you get asked to help teach your friends?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent

25. Time management skills: Using your time wisely and consistently staying on schedule and meeting deadlines. Did you take this quiz instead of finishing your assignment, or are you taking this while checking email between classes?

☐ Nonexistent ☐ Poor ☐ Average
☐ Good ☐ Excellent