**Life Skills Development Programme**

**Underlying principles**

1. Rather than focusing on something specific (like for ex. In Communication – where the focus typically is on just the ability to speak and write cogently and legibly) the intent is on creating / building an underlying foundation or framework for each of these areas
2. Given that there is a lag in terms of the focus on building these skills (typically the expectation is that children in the age group of 7 years to 15 years need to be imparted these skills since that is supposed to be the right time for them to pick these up – whereas we are targeting students in the age groups of 18-22) a specific / unique methodology needs to be adopted or evolved to target these students which will potentially provide them with these skills.
3. Instead of running them through a series of lectures it is imperative that we need to make the whole exercise into a series of games / activities which are interlocking and build on the ones before and continuously enhance the skill profile from one to the other.
4. Focus on the individual, always, even while looking at group games / activities. As far as possible each game / activity should be targeted at 1 person – only in instances where the skill to be built is something like Teamwork, Leadership, Collaboration should groups be brought into play
5. The overall program should be very tightly planned in terms of content – for ex. The first thing that they have been trained on feeds into the second and builds on it, the second feeds into the third and builds on it. It is cumulative. So the structuring of the program should be done ‘rightly’.
6. Since we are focussing on building skills through games / activities only and the program is built to cumulate skill as it progresses it is imperative that we need to create a suite of appropriate games / activities (delivery can be through any means practical – question papers, presentations, videos etc.) – these need to be of an appropriate number in order to ensure that there is an element of uniqueness across the teams (say 1 out of 5-8 – meaning for a group of 40 students we need to have at least 5 to 8 unique games or activities for teaching a specific skill or part of a skill).

**Skills to be developed**

1. **Communication** 
   1. Active Listening
   2. ‘Knowing’ when to speak and when not to
   3. Ability to communicate clearly and cogently and ensure understanding of what has been communicated – orally and in writing
   4. Ability to communicate ‘appropriately’ to different sets of people – internal and external (external could be customers, partners, vendors, statutory authorities etc., internal could be peers, managers at different levels, juniors etc.)
   5. Ability to start, build and maintain a conversation with anyone – in the process putting across the viewpoints clearly, being able to respond to cross questioning / criticism effectively, be able to debate effectively
   6. Be able to present their case in front of a large group of people and respond to queries criticism effectively.
   7. Participate and hold their views effectively in situations / conversations which are hostile / negative
   8. Create a framework on – given a specific communication need – what and what not to communicate, how to communicate, when to communicate
2. **General Awareness** 
   1. “Know what is happening around you” – in general, in an area of interest (Technology, Business, Politics, Sport….) – ‘Curiosity’
   2. Spend time (and money) in knowing more
   3. Useful as a tool to strike up conversations and build relationships
   4. Goal is to build a mental framework within the student to achieve the following
      1. Internalizing the principle that “Continuous Learning / Skill Building” is a lifelong activity and is a foundation of their life – these could be appropriate skills for appropriate roles as they evolve, skills for new roles as they present themselves, skills for venturing into a completely new area of development altogether
      2. Identifying new skills to build or existing skills to scale
      3. Methods for picking up / scaling a new or existing skill / knowledge area
3. **Critical Thinking** (The Art Of Taking Charge Of Your Own Mind - <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-concept-of-critical-thinking/411>, https://www.utc.edu/walker-center-teaching-learning/teaching-resources/ct-ps.php) and **Problem Solving Skills** (<https://www.edx.org/course/problem-solving-and-critical-thinking-skills> - problem solving is done using Design Thinking)
   1. Creating an ability (a framework in their mind) to apply the student’s mind, independently, in assessing a situation / problem / information and arriving at conclusions / solutions / ideas.
   2. Ensuring that they have the capacity to think for themselves instead of engaging in group think or fall into misperceptions.
   3. Be able to subject their thoughts to rigorous questioning (internally and externally), all in the aid of ensuring that they arrive at the right conclusions / solutions.
4. **Collaboration and Team Working**
   1. A little background will help here – The reality of working in an IT organization at a lower level (programmer / developer / tester) are
      1. Moving from one project / team / location to another frequently (the frequency could be from 3 months to 18 months)
      2. Brought into the project / assignment at varying stages of the lifecycle (right at the beginning when a team is being setup or after the team setup is done and there is a need for developers to be onboarded or replace an existing team member who is leaving / not found good enough or the team is being expanded in order to take care of emergencies or …….)
      3. The role expected to be fulfilled might vary from one project / assignment to another.
   2. Given the above background the individual is needed to have strong collaboration and team working skills
   3. The Skills needed to achieve this goal (Trust, Role Clarity, Diversity of Ideas, Open and Effective Communication, Buidling and Maintaining Relationships, Focus on Team Goals) (<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/development/collaboration-teamwork>, <https://www.smartsheet.com/collaborative-teamwork>) need to be Developed / imparted / Drilled into the students – since this has a bearing (and feeds off of) many of the other soft skills that a person needs to develop – and ultimately defines success or failure for the person.
5. **Domain Knowledge**
   1. In an IT Company an individual is expected to transverse across many Vertical (Retail, Manufacturing, Financial Services etc.) and Horizontal (eCommerce, Analytics, Digital Transformation etc. - + Technical Skills) Domains through the course of their career.
   2. Given the state of the industry this ability will become more critical – from the POV of being able to hit the ground running in any area, adaptability / flexibility / agility will become of paramount importance
   3. Creating the ability to absorb the needs of any domain in a relatively short period of time using a framework / model / method is what we are trying to achieve here – for sample sake we might end up choosing a specific Domain to build knowledge / expertise about.
6. **Leadership** 
   1. In the context of the programs that we plan to run and their target audience the appropriate definition that I think we need to use is – “the Ability to Influence others towards the Achievement of a Common Goal”
   2. To be able to achieve that a person needs to possess – honesty and integrity, the ability to see the big picture, the ability to give and receive feedback, courage and confidence, enthusiasm and the ability to focus on and stay focused on the Goal to be achieved under any and all circumstances.
   3. Are there a set of tools / models that we can create within people to ensure that we can zero in on these skills / characteristics and develop them?
7. **Time Management** 
   1. In the context of the programs that we plan to run and their target audience the appropriate definition that I think we need to use is – the Process of Planning and Exercising Conscious Control of Time spent on specific activities, especially to increase Effectiveness, Efficiency or Productivity
   2. I assume that there are several techniques to manage time – most of which are scientifically proven to work.
   3. Choose 1-2 of the most prevalent ones and train the students on those in a rigorous day-to-day way.
   4. The intent is to ensure that this becomes a discipline they follow lifelong.
8. **Initiative (staying motivated, being creative)**
   1. ‘Don’t wait for someone to come and tell you what you have to do today’
   2. ‘Don’t wait for the problem or issue to reveal itself’
   3. ‘Is there a better way to do this?’
   4. Rather than waiting for directions from managers the individual needs to take the initiative in most cases
   5. The ability to assess the needs, look at options, choose one and execute without waiting is a critical need that most organizations have of their staff today.
   6. “Taking the Initiative” is a key element expected of all staff
9. **Basic Sales and Customer Service Skills**
   1. Need to clarify why this is needed first.
   2. One of the biggest challenges that faces a new recruit (and the organization that they belong to) is their lack of confidence as well as lack of understanding in facing up to a customer – even in a non-intrusive environment (where there are no problems – where they just need to report their involvement and progress). This can happen F2F, over a call or over a mail. Due to this a huge load gets created within the existing team in order to ensure that they cover for the new recruits within the team – which is detracting them from their day-to-day work schedule and productivity.
   3. Also the new recruit, because of this lack of trust from within the team (deservedly so), loses a great opportunity for learning and building a relationship with the customer and the other members in the team.
   4. If this can be addressed this will go a long way towards building the career of the new recruit as well as ensuring the project team is working on their deliverables as per plan.
   5. The Typical skills that need to be built here are – Active Listening, Attentiveness, Clear Communication, Patience, Ability to ‘Read’ Customers, Ability to handle ‘Surprises’, Willingness to Learn, Tenacity.
10. **Ethics / Trustworthiness / Integrity** 
    1. A lot of the literature that I have read has focussed a lot on these.
    2. Most of the literature ranks them No. 1 or close to the top in terms of valued soft skills that people are looking for
    3. How teachable this is – not clear to me.

The following is what we have said we will be doing in the soft skills training area

■Scientific Individual Assessment

■Targeted Training programs

■Individual mentoring as needed

■Develop Problem Solving & Critical Thinking skills through Project Work

■Technology Driven – data oriented