Soft Skills-The Need of the Hour for Professional Competence: A Review on Interpersonal Skills and Intrapersonal Skills Theories

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Abstract
Professional competence in the job needs a serious attention as the last decade has seen an increase in the number of industries like the IT Sectors, Retail, Travel, Transport, Financial Services, Hospitality, Beauty and Health care. Even though job opportunities have increased to considerable extent in recent years, it is difficult to find a suitable candidate and this merely indicates that we have a shortage of individuals who are employable. The growth in the number of students waiting to be employed versus those who could be employed requires urgent attention. Educational institutions have realized the need for inculcating soft skills to their students along with the academic qualification (the hard skills) to ensure their professional competence. Soft skills are distinct from the hard skills and are recognized as the key to bridge the talent gap we face in India today. It is essential to interact with the clients and to work in a collaborative manner within the team. This reflects on the work quality and productivity. Soft skills are more to do with who we are than what we know. The hard skills may be the foundation to a successful career. However, they need to be cemented with soft skills. Soft skills can be categorised as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are very much noticeable to others and they are the competence of an individual to interpret and manage his/her own feelings, actions, motivations and that of others in the social contexts. Intrapersonal skills deal with feelings, thoughts and emotions that are stirred up within an individual. This skill is not apparent because it is within a person and the individual next to them may not be aware of it. This paper aims at explaining the need for soft skills for the professional competence and reviews the theories of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills where in need for acquiring those skills are considered as the need of the hour by many experts.

Keywords: Soft skills, Professional Competence, Interpersonal Skills, Intrapersonal Skills.

Introduction
Professional competence in the job needs a serious attention as the last decade has seen an increase in the number of industries like the IT Sectors, Retail, Travel, Transport, Financial Services, Hospitality, Beauty and Health care. This has brought a positive change in creating more employment opportunities. For a competitive edge, companies are constructing their initiatives on customer or client expectations. As people today are better informed of the market and the options available, their expectations need to be met and the responsibility lies with each individual at every point of interaction within the company. The HR team faces the burden of hiring people who are competent of positively interacting within the corporate culture. It’s difficult to find a suitable candidate and this merely indicates that we have a shortage of individuals who are employable. The growth in the number of students waiting to be employed versus those who could be employed requires urgent attention. Educational institutions have realized the need for inculcating soft skills to their students along with the academic qualification (the hard skills) to ensure their professional competence. Soft skills are distinct from the hard skills and are recognized as the key to bridge the talent gap we face in India today. It is essential to interact with the clients and to work in a collaborative manner within the team. This reflects on the work quality and productivity. Soft skills are more to do with who we are than what we know. The hard skills may be the foundation to a successful career. However, they need to be cemented with soft skills.

Soft Skills – Definition and Introduction
Generally speaking, ‘soft skills’ is a term related to a collection of personal, positive attributes and competencies that enhance a person’s relationships, job performance and value to the market. Soft skills include one’s ability to listen well, communicate effectively, approach positively, handle conflict, take responsibility, show respect, build trust, work well with others, manage time effectively, accept criticism, work under pressure, amiable to others and demonstrate good manners. Bunk (1994) has framed the model of structural change in today’s society considering the above skills through his concept of ‘professional competence’. Accordingly an employee within modern production systems can be described as...anyone who is able to solve work tasks in an independent and flexible way and is able and willing to become involved in planning within his or her occupational environment and within the work organization.
Thus, a person with good job skills becomes noticeable with the monotonous workforce and facilitates skilled employees. Some of the soft skills needed for the workplace are assertiveness, anger management, team work, problem solving, communication skill and perseverance termed as interpersonal skills, and flexibility, resourcefulness, goal
setting, taking initiative, self-development and critical thinking which are termed as intrapersonal skills. According to Kechagias (2011) Soft skills are categorised as intra and Interpersonal skills (socio-emotional) essential for personal development, social participation and workplace success. Life skills or soft skills are a group of interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills which can help individuals make implored choices, good understanding, communicate effectively and develop coping-up mechanisms. Interpersonal skills are the talents or ability that help a person to mingle easily with other people. Individuals with this kind of attitude are highly friendly, able to work well with various kinds of people, skilled at assessing the emotions, motivations, desires and intentions of those around them. Intrapersonal skills primarily involve characters or conditions of a human being that aid to form his/her personality. Individuals who are strong in intrapersonal skills are good at being aware of their own emotional states, feelings and motivations and feel positive about what they are doing in their lives. They tend to enjoy self-reflection and analysis, explore relationships with others and assess their personal strengths.

Need for Soft Skills Training
Soft skills are needed for everyday life in every place as much as they are needed in a workplace. The nature of today’s job demands creativity, confidence, assertiveness and team building skills. As Luthans Fred (2002) states No longer just dependent on financial capital or capital equipment, today’s organisations need human capital (employees’ experience, skills and creative ideas) to be used as leverage for competitive advantage. In order to survive and thrive in the highly competitive environment, organisations require employees with adaptability, problem solving ability and communication skills.

International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP 2007) reports that “sixty-seven per cent of human resource (HR) managers would hire an applicant with strong soft skills whose technical abilities were lacking.” In the increasingly globalised world and the internationalised nature of workplaces, the young graduates of India are found short of many skills expected by the employers. Records suggest that only 25% of the Indian graduates are employable and their chief deficiencies are identified in the areas of communicative language skills, teamwork, ability to learn new concepts and leadership qualities. It is becoming obvious that this new breed of students need to master soft skills in addition to the much valued technical skills for their professional competence. The research conducted by Smyth Country Industry Council Workforce Demand Profile (2003) says People most likely to be hired for available jobs have what employers call ‘Soft Skills.’ The council has given a list of personal traits and skills that employer’s state as most important when selecting employees for jobs of any type. They are flexibility, writing skills, basic spelling and grammar, posture, work ethic, adaptability, critical thinking skills, willingness to learn, good attitude etc.

The results of the survey are called ‘the workforce profile’ which has found an across the board unanimous profile of skills and characteristics needed to make a good employee. The most common qualities mentioned by the employers are positive work ethic, good attitude towards learning and be trained. Numerous research studies reveal that most of the job promotions happen because of the attitude of the employees and only a few because of their qualifications. The recent hiring strategy has entirely changed when compared to the past and a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE 2008) reports. The top characteristics looked for in new hires by 276 employer respondents have been ‘soft skills, communication ability, a strong work ethic, initiative, interpersonal skills and teamwork’.

Lack of English knowledge hurdles many at campus recruitment avenues and in addition, the report by IBRC (2007) says While credentials (degrees and certificates) are important, it is the development of soft skills (those that are more social than technical) that is significant for developing a strong and vibrant workforce.

At various stages of the career, the soft skills requirement keeps varying. Soft skills.blogspot.com (2008) defines soft skills as Personality traits, social grace, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark people to varying degrees. Soft skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirement of a job. Soft skills are obligatory for the success of the employees, employers and also for the institution as they help to lever the competitive market, latest technology, different human resources, globalization and distinguish the best organisation from the rest. Luthans Fred (2008) has stated that The human resources of an organization and how they are managed represent the competitive advantage of today’s and tomorrow’s organization and are becoming widely recognized as human capital (what you know-education experience and skills).

An employee with ample soft skill is considered as an asset as he/she creates conducive work atmosphere. One has to build an equally strong competence in soft skills to be an efficient team member and a much sought after employee. Even though students encompass certain people skills due to their background and exposure, it is inadequate if the student possesses only these skills to impress the recruiters. This is because of the fact that the corporate sectors are seeking and opting for candidates who not only have the requisite academic qualifications but also with sufficient interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills to function in the globalised setting where they have to deal with people of different culture and situations with a professional mindset. So, training in workplace soft skills has become mandatory for today’s graduates throughout the world. Research studies say that considering the industrial scenario and to cater to the needs of students, universities and colleges all over the world adopt many training techniques to enhance these skills as soft skills training assists the students with strong conceptual and practical framework to build, manage and develop into all-rounders.
The scope and impact of roles keep increasing as career progresses and therefore based on the requirement, careful analysis is needed to select appropriate methods to impart soft skills. Considering the prerequisites of corporate sectors, colleges have started introducing courses on soft skills as a compulsory subject to highlight the job skills like assertiveness, stress management, leadership qualities, team work, communication skills, time management, and so on.

An important question here is whether traits like team leadership, team building, assertiveness, perseverance and stress management can be taught. The answer is ‘yes’ but the training depends on the degree or level of the students. The method of teaching must show some variation from the contemporary methods like delivery of lectures, concepts and themes. It would be better if teaching and training are intertwined in the classroom for inculcating interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

**Interpersonal Skills**

Soft skills can be categorised as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are very much noticeable to others and they are the competence of an individual to interpret and manage his/her own feelings, actions, motivations and that of others in the social contexts. A sense of managing one-self is the basic aspect of interpersonal intelligence. Individuals with this kind of genius are highly reflective and likely to have either hunch or a belief in a higher order. Interpersonal skills are also termed as ‘people skills’ and ‘life skills’ as they aid a person to communicate and interact with individuals and groups well. Marlow-Ferguson (2002) has defined interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Intrapersonal skills are the skills that are situated in the mind of an individual. The other end of this axis is the interpersonal skills which relate to relationships or communication between people. Interpersonal skills are essential for people to be successful in their personal and professional lives. Employers nowadays place high importance on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and give rather less weight to technical skills. The concept of interpersonal skills has been described by Rungapadiachy (1999).

Interpersonal skills may be defined broadly as those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people. A person with commendable interpersonal skills is assured to get a decent job and establish remarkable rapport in the workplace with managers and colleagues. Skills like assertiveness, team work, stress management, leadership qualities, problem solving, communication, perseverance, decision making, anger management and listening skills are termed as interpersonal skills.

**Review of Interpersonal Skills Theories**

This part of the paper review the theories of interpersonal skills which are a pre-requisite for the students because they have to work in teams in their career and when operating in teams, the technical expertise along with the ability (interpersonal skills) to move with the members of the team to complete the project matters a lot. SAICA (2006) has analysed the interpersonal skills that lead to better performance in the job. Skills that will enable someone to work with others for the common good of the business, receive and transmit information, form reasoned judgements and make effective decisions.

Nowadays, balancing the technical expertise and leading a team to finish the work go hand in hand for which interpersonal skills are very much needed. Tenedero (2001) states the capability of a person with good social skills thus, Interpersonal intelligence is a facility in relating to other people. Individuals with this kind of genius are highly sociable, able to work well with various kinds of people. They lead and influence others, mediate conflict and build consensus. They are genuinely interested in other people. Research shows that employees with keen interpersonal skills often have the edge in gaining the respect of peers and bosses. Whatever be the role of an individual it is one’s behaviour that plays a crucial part in determining the success of the workplace. The Investopedia (2012), an agency supporting business deals has declared its view about interpersonal skills.

The term "interpersonal skills" is somewhat of a misnomer, because it refers to character traits possessed by an individual rather than skills that can be taught in a classroom. Within an organization, employees with good interpersonal skills are likely to be more productive than those with poor interpersonal skills, because of their propensity to project a positive attitude and look for solutions to problems. The optimistic attitude of a person is indispensable to gain success in the professional life. Optimists are happier, healthier, and live longer. Researchers say that depression is expected to become the second biggest killer next to heart disease by 2020. Pessimism in the workplace is intensifying nowadays. The 2003 survey by the job agency SEEK (2003) on job satisfaction of the employees has expressed that “49 per cent of respondents said that they were unhappy or very unhappy with their job”. Low job satisfaction causes a negative workplace culture and attitude which not only pushes the work into drain but also the business to serious economic loss. Hayes (2000) points out the necessity for the employees to possess the interpersonal skills.

They have to develop interpersonal skills to accomplish the project at hand as they need “goal directed” behaviors used in face-to-face interactions which are effective in bringing about a desired state of affairs.

Today, the industry expectation from a fresher is higher than in the past. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001) has specified the anticipated qualities from the fresh employees.

Initiative, motivation and communication skills are considered as particularly relevant, because a motivated new hire easily could obtain the necessary specific skills through training or on-the-job experience. A new worker easily acclimatises himself/herself to the novel atmosphere if he/she has good interpersonal skills. In order to meet the competitive environment, companies employ a person with good social and behavioural skills. Barry L. Reece and Rhonda Brandt (2006) acknowledge the selection
Intrapersonal Skills

Intrapersonal skills deal with feelings, thoughts and emotions that are stirred up within an individual. This skill is not apparent because it is within a person and the individual next to them may not be aware of it. The American Heritage Dictionary 2010 has given the meaning of intrapersonal skill as “existing or occurring within the individual self or mind.” Intrapersonal skill is to do with self and it is the skill that helps one manage what is going on inside oneself. An illustration of intrapersonal skill is someone having consciousness of how they affect the world around them by managing their emotion in the tough conditions. Tenedero (2001) has stated the qualities of people with intrapersonal skills.

Intrapersonal skills are also defined as those skills individuals require to possess and perfect in order to manage themselves and it is a prerequisite to interpersonal skills. It is to be noted that intrapersonal skills lessen internal conflict of the person concerned and make the person understand how to handle the perceived external experience internally and come to terms with one’s qualities, limitations and potential. Students with strong intrapersonal skills are kind, conscious of their approach and plans and work well independently. They are self-reflective, self-motivated and learn most effectively when provided with opportunities and do the work in a focused manner. To sum up, it gives a clear meaning of one’s own act, appearance and how one carries oneself in front of the people. Intrapersonal skills focus on the abilities like flexibility, resourcefulness, self-esteem, goal setting, taking initiative, self-awareness and critical thinking. These elements can be obtained by doing some research on oneself in order to better off one’s skills. What goes on inside the mind of a person is the intrapersonal skill which affects the person’s interaction with the outside world. It impacts the body language, listening skills and likeability. It also affects one’s performance, critical and analytical thinking and particularly one’s capacity for innovation.

It is indeed worth training the college students in intrapersonal skills as it is the necessary foundation for acquiring leadership skills. There is no use in giving students training in communication skills, without giving them the skills to handle internal struggle and it is like building a big tower and balconies on a house without proper foundation. At the first earthquake, everything will fall apart. There are many advantages of acquiring intrapersonal skills. It increases self-confidence and enables one to form friends, work with people more effectively, take more responsibility and increase productivity. It maximises working conditions and environment to work well and ensures better understanding with others which helps to resolve conflicts. People with good intrapersonal skills initiate new situations more quickly and develop resilience. The study focuses on the need for acquiring intrapersonal skills for the students to perform well in the workplace.
Review of Theories on Intrapersonal Skills

This part of the paper reviews the theories of Intrapersonal skills which help one to manage feelings, responses and actions, so that one is able to function at his/her best. The ‘intrapersonal’ world has the most profound effect upon a person’s responses, thinking, behaviour, views of one’s own self feelings and achievement. Many scholars have shared their opinions regarding the theories of intrapersonal skills (http://voices2011) has elucidated intrapersonal skills thus:

It touches upon what is closest to our hearts and being. Intrapersonal development requires that a person seeks to understand the psychological mechanisms and sociological dynamics that determine the emotions they experience. With this context as a backdrop, they can then have a better grasp of the reasons behind their feelings when faced with current environmental stimuli or memories of past events.

Fitzsimons & Bargh (2004) have defined intrapersonal skills as “The capacity of individuals to guide themselves, in any way possible, toward important goal states.” Brown (2000) has described intrapersonal skills as “The capacity to plan, guide, and monitor one’s behaviour flexibly in the face of changing circumstances.” Zimmerman (2000) has outlined intrapersonal skills as “Self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals.” Ilkowska & Engle, (2010) have expressed intrapersonal skills as “The process by which one monitors, directs attention, maintains and modifies behaviours to approach a desirable goal.” People with good intrapersonal skills use their creative ideas and accomplish any difficult task. Zauszniecki (2006) has found that those who are high in both personal and social resourcefulness have better adaptive functioning and less anxiety and depression than those who are high on social or personal resourcefulness alone.

Resourcefulness plays a vital role in shaping a person to cope up with difficult circumstances. Rosenbaum (1990) has articulated the benefits of these skills and says that ‘self-help skills’ that constitute personal resourcefulness, also referred to as ‘learned resourcefulness’, involve strategies for coping independently with daily tasks and the stress that may be involved in completing them. Holmer (1995) has suggested the significance of emotional intelligence or intrapersonal skills in the workplace.

The extent to which we actually practice what we know and preach as good organisational practise is in large measure a function of the competence with which we respond to emotional challenge.

The term emotional challenge refers to any real or perceived threat to one’s security, self-image or sense of self-worth that stimulates a person’s instinctive self-protective tendencies to withdraw aggression. Tenedero (2001) has opined that a sense of self is a basic aspect of intrapersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence is a facility in self-management. Individuals with this kind of genius are highly introspective and tend to have either sixth sense or a belief in a higher order. They are generally quiet and deliberate, work well alone and manage their personal growth and search for identity.

A qualitative survey on firms on ‘recruitment strategies for entry-level jobs’ in the United States has found the Employer Survey (1994 and 1997) showing that among the hiring criteria for potential employees, intrapersonal and communication skills are the highest ranked, followed by work experience. In the United Kingdom, employers have reported that communication skills, learning ability, problem-solving skills, team work and the capacity for self-management are more important than technical, ICT or numeracy skills as criteria in the recruitment of graduates (Hesketh 2000). This research scrutinises the foremost intrapersonal skills like flexibility, resourcefulness, self-esteem, goal setting, self-development and critical thinking in the major characters of Harry Potter novels.

Conclusion

Soft skills or behavioural skills, which are a cluster of personal qualities like friendliness, optimism, communication skill, teamwork and goal setting, play a significant role in a person’s success and they help one in adapting to novel circumstances. Reviewing the theories on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills has proved that the traditional notion of emphasising on technical knowledge alone is no longer useful for the success of an organisation. So, training the students in soft skills is necessary to gain professional competence. Change is imperative and we need to understand this and must be willing to change. This would lead to a better tomorrow resulting in an improvement in the employable quotient.

References


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