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Soft Skills Significance for Learning and Career Achievement

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Abstract

Soft skills are essential to a successful profession and social interactions in the society. Employees hiring recent college grads value these abilities highly as well. The primary goal of this research was to learn about students' perceptions on the value of soft skills in their educational and professional lives. 190 undergraduate business management students from four Indian university campuses participated in a study to gather data. The majority of those polled said that soft skills were important for building bridges within communities and advancing one's career. Because of this, they didn't see the value in using these skills in the classroom. Collaborative and teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and time management were among the student's preferred soft skills, according to the instructor. Students' soft skills can be improved in a variety of ways, and these strategies may also improve

their employment prospects, according to this article.

Introduction

More than ever, today's business environment is attractive because of its wide range of features and characteristics. There are several types of companies, and each one has a distinct benefit in terms of human capital. When it comes to hiring and promoting employees who are ethical and resourceful as well as self-motivated and enthusiastic about their work, most business owners choose those who have a positive outlook on life. [1] Having a well-rounded team is highly valued by employers, who want to hire people who have a mix of hard and soft talents, in addition to a strong background in the field [2]. Organizational goals and objectives cannot be achieved solely by the use of specialized or practical skills. Because their employees will likewise be participating in various levels of leadership and decision-making. Employees must also be able to communicate effectively



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with their clients and other investors within the company.

Soft skills are primarily concerned with a person's traits, personality qualities, and personal behavior. Problem-solving, communication, time management, decision-making, and self-motivation are all examples of soft skills [3]. Businesses' perspectives on the importance of various talents were explored by Burchell and Hodges [4]. There were eight of the top ten skills that were described as soft skills, including ability and willingness to learn, cooperation and teamwork as well as interpersonal communication, enthusiasm and energy and problem-solving skills. Surveyed more than 7,000 Indian managers in more than 50 different occupations, soft skills were shown to be the most important competence in nearly all of them [5] vocations, even in the most technological environments. Even if it is well-known that companies are increasingly prioritizing soft skills, it is equally important for students to raise the value of these skills and make deliberate decisions to acquire them. According to Porter, [6]. Many students in business do not place much importance on developing their soft skills, according to the author. According to Rynes et al [7], the business students' attitude toward interactive courses with a significant focus on soft skills development is usually unfavorable, and their hesitancy to register for such courses is often a result of this. As a result, there is a lack of soft skills in business

graduates entering the workforce, leading to a lack of awareness.

As a result, educational institutions are now under increased pressure to improve the soft skills of their pupils. For this study, Kumara and Sahasranam employed a core soft skills record test to measure engineering students' soft abilities. They argued that well-planned training programs can help students build a sense of self-confidence and cultivate their soft skills. Business students' ability to write effective business letters can be improved by the use of projects based on real-world organizations and conditions, according to Addams et al [9]. Professors and students in information systems programs at various Indian colleges were interviewed for their perspectives on the importance of soft skills in the workplace. Students, it was said, were more satisfied with the emphasis on soft skills than faculty members. As a result of this understanding, some studies have also highlighted the importance of soft skills in the prospectus, making it easier for students to acquire them [11, 12].

Many studies have been conducted from an owner's perspective, but only a small number have looked at how students regard soft skills and their attitudes and views of them. In addition, more of these studies were conducted in India than in other Asian nations, despite the fact that the educational environment and work culture in India differ greatly. As a result,



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it is worthwhile to examine students' perceptions of soft skills from a fresh perspective and context. The study's primary goal was to evaluate the perspectives of students studying business organizations on the value of soft skills for their education and careers. For example, this study focused on how students perceive the significance of soft skills, their self-efficacy in controlling their degree of control, and the role that academic organizations play in the development of new soft skills.

1. Methodology

Student surveys from Vishweshwaraya University (VTU), Central University Karnataka (CUK), Osmania University of Hyderabad (Osm), and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU Hyderabad) in India were utilized to compile the data. Multiple choice and rating scale matrix questions made up the bulk of the questionnaire, which was used to gather data. Most of the questions were closed-ended, but when necessary, respondents were given the opportunity to provide further information or make additional remarks. We received ethical clearance from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning this research. Convenience sampling was used to choose the sample of survey takers in this study. Students in the business management program at the four universities selected for this study were asked to participate in the study by way of

an oral request. Those pupils who demonstrated an interest in participating were given a copy of the questionnaire. For two weeks in the second quarter of 2011, 188 students took part in the poll.

3 Findings

The results of the survey are summarized in the following sections.

Respondents' summary

VTU (51), CUK (50), OSM (49), and JNTU (49) all had a similar number of contributors in this study (44). The data study is based on 180 totally filled-in survey forms because five respondents did not complete the survey. 68.5 percent of the students were from India, while 32.4 percent were from other countries. In terms of gender, there were more female respondents (56,7%) than male respondents (40.7 percent). 70 respondents (39 percent) were in their second year of study, while 41 (22.8 percent) were in their first year, 54 (26.9 percent) were in their third year, and only 19 (9.7 percent) were in their fourth year of study. It was discovered that five pupils had not stated their academic year.

Awareness of soft skills

Students who participated in the survey were asked to identify the soft skills they believe are most important in today's workplace. To find out if they have a good grasp of soft skills, we conducted the study. A list of 14 competencies was



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compiled after conducting a thorough literature review. Fewer than 40 students (21.3 percent) picked all of the skills out of the 180 students that took the survey, demonstrating their naiveté about the

importance of soft skills. The student identified leadership, communication, negotiation, and persuasion as the four most important soft skills (see Table 1).

Table 1. Skills considered as soft skills by the respondents (multiple responses)

Ranking	Soft Skills	Frequency (n=180)
1	Communication skills	142
2	Leadership skills	117
3	Persuasion skills	111
4	Negotiation skills	106
5	Conflict management	92
6	Time management	74
7	Problem solving	70
8	Teamwork spirit	71
9	Creative problem solving	71
10	Personal effectiveness	63
11	Strategic thinking	62
12	Confident work attitude	55
13	Enthusiasm to learn	49
14	Desire towards work	43

The majority of students did not consider positive work attitudes, a willingness to learn, and a passion for one's job to be examples of soft skills. Other soft abilities

Professed significance of soft skills

Students were tested on their understanding of the importance of soft skills using a series of statements. Soft skills were widely accepted or strongly supported by the majority of students who

attended the workshop. They were also highly sought after by employers (see Table 2). Soft skills are just as difficult to learn as expert knowledge and skills, according to 103 (55.1%) of the participants in the survey. Many respondents were either concerned or strongly disagreed with the claims that soft skills cannot be acquired via repetition and that these skills were not as important in the workplace as expert knowledge and skills. This indicates that pupils are aware of the importance and value of soft skills.



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Table 2. General perceptions of soft skills (n=187)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
Soft skills are serious for career improvement	7	8	40	84	53
Soft skills are extremely sought after by employers	7	9	42	89.5	35
Soft skills are important for getting a better job	6	9	49	96	35
Soft skills are hard to learn compared to professional knowledge	4	30	47	82	21
Soft skills cannot be enhanced through practice	26	82	46	29	7
Soft skills are not as important as professional knowledge	49	52	39	32	13

SD: severely disagree, D: strongly disagree, N: neutral, A: agree, SA: strongly agree

On the 7-point semantic variance scale, students were asked to rank the importance of soft skills for different purposes. For 'receiving along with people' (mean score 5.70), soft skills were rated as the

most important, followed by 'professional progress' (mean score 5.46). However, the students viewed these talents as being of little importance to their academic success.

Table 3. Importance of soft skills

Purpose	n	Mean (1~7)	SD
Getting along with people	188	6.10	1.36
Career advancement	188	5.48	1.62
Finding a job	188	5.01	1.62
Academic performance	188	4.23	1.81

Students were asked to rate the relative importance of a set of 14 previously studied soft skills for job purposes in order to further validate their understanding of

the importance of these skills. Teamwork, problem solving, leadership, time management, and decision-making were ranked as the top five skills (see Table 4).

Table 4. Importance of soft skills for employment



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Soft Skills	n	Mean (1~7)	SD
Leadership	187	5.33	1.45
Teamwork and collaboration	187	5.27	1.38
Decision-making	187	5.23	1.53
Problem-solving	186	5.58	1.29
Time management	187	5.54	1.26
Passion and optimism	187	5.19	1.15
Critical thinking skills	183	5.17	1.35
Willingness to learn	187	5.56	1.47
Self-motivation and self-direction	186	5.26	1.50
Making presentations	187	4.05	1.64
Small group discussions	187	4.00	1.60
Writing business communications	187	5.91	1.22
Writing proposals	187	5.68	1.19
Writing memoranda	186	5.62	1.14

Five communication-related soft skills appeared to be the least important when looking for work, which was cause for concern. The majority of the respondents (145 out of a total of 752, percent) considered it to be a soft talent, therefore that's what it was mostly about. So, despite the fact that they list communication skills as a soft talent, they don't consider them important when seeking for work, despite the time and effort they put into applying for jobs and attending interviews.

Importance of soft skills for different professions

Students were asked to describe the importance of soft skills in various business-related professions, and their responses were analyzed. For roles where business professionals contact often with clients and other stakeholders, such as marketing executives, sales employees and insurance advisors, students believed that soft skills were particularly important (see Table 5). Contrary to popular belief, financial analysts, auditors, and accountants in the back office require significantly fewer soft skills. Soft skills are still important for those who work in these positions even though they may not interact with customers on a daily basis.

Table 5. Level of soft skills required by different category of professionals (n=188)



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Profession	Mean (1~7)	SD
Marketing Executives	5.56	1.11
Sales Personnel	5.64	1.50
Insurance Service Consultants	5.42	1.40
Media & Advertising Executives	5.22	1.40
Corporate Communications Officers	5.56	1.27
Human Resource Officers	5.54	1.29
Project Management Executives	5.47	1.26
Financial Service Consultants	5.22	1.21
Business Administrators	4.66	1.57
Stock Brokers	4.77	1.66
Bank Executives	4.66	1.67
Financial Analysts	4.66	1.29
Auditors	4.29	1.60
Accountants	3.88	1.66

Students' perception of the level of soft skills possessed by them

Student evaluations of soft skills were solicited from each participant. A

student survey found that eagerness to learn, collaboration, optimism, and the ability to manage one's time were among the most sought-after soft skills (see Table 6).

Table 6. Self-assessment of the level of soft skills possessed by the respondents (n=188)

Soft Skills	Mean (1~7)	SD
Willingness to learn	5.42	1.22
Teamwork and collaboration	5.42	1.24
Passion and optimism	5.01	1.20
Time management	5.02	1.34
Self-motivation and self-direction	4.97	1.24
Decision-making	4.97	1.21
Problem-solving	4.98	1.20
Leadership	4.91	1.32
Critical thinking skills	4.91	1.36
Small group discussions	4.83	1.26
Writing proposals	4.63	1.13



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Making presentations	4.63	1.46
Writing business communications	4.54	1.22
Writing memoranda	4.42	1.23

Table 7. Correlation between perceived importance and skills level

Soft Skills	Correlation
Willingness to learn	.395(**)
Teamwork and cooperation	.384(**)
Passion and optimism	.355(**)
Time management	.231(**)
Self-motivation and self-direction	.416(**)
Decision-making	.244(**)
Problem-solving	.235(**)
Leadership	.186(*)
Critical thinking skills	.305(**)
Small group discussions	.524(**)
Writing proposals	.121
Making presentations	.529(**)
Writing business communications	.184(*)
Writing memoranda	.259(**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.4 Desire for improving soft skills

When asked which soft skills they thought they should improve, the people who took the survey were given a choice. Leadership and communication were the two most sought-after soft talents by students (see Table 8). In the past, these two soft abilities were also considered the

most important (see Table 1). According to Table 4, when communication abilities were broken down into distinct talents, they were ranked the lowest in terms of importance. The pupils appeared to have certain misperceptions about the range of distinct Communication skills.



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Table 8. Soft skills needing improvement (multiple responses)

1	Leadership skills	88
2	Communication skills	87
Ranking	Soft Skills	Frequency (n=188)
3	Persuasion skills	83
4	Negotiation skills	80
5	Conflict resolution	79
6	Time management	71
7	Strategic thinking	68
8	Problem solving	63
9	Personal effectiveness	62
9 (tied)	Creative problem solving	62
11	Positive work attitude	39
12	Willingness to learn	38
13	Teamwork spirit	35
14	Passion towards work	34

Persuasion and bargaining were the next two soft skills students wished to enhance. Only 20% of students wished to strengthen four soft skills: a good attitude toward work, a willingness to learn, a spirit of cooperation, and a passion for work. It's possible that this was due to the fact that only a small percentage of students had previously considered these abilities to be part of what we call "soft skills" (see Table 1).

Due to the fact that many prior research imply that most students lack appropriate communication skills, students participating in this study were asked about the obstacles they faced when learning and practicing various forms of communication. Lack of self-confidence, anxiousness, shyness, and a lack of sufficient training were the top four impediments that students mentioned (see Table 9).

Barrier to developing and practicing communication skills



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Table 9. Barriers to practicing communication skills (n=188)

	Barriers	Frequen cy
1	Lack of confidence	89
2	Nervousness	88
3	Shyness	59
4	Lack of proper training	58
5	Non-encouraging environment	51
6	Language deficiency	48
7	Lack of knowledge	47
8	Cultural barriers	38

Limited English ability and cultural differences did not appear to be substantial hurdles to communication despite the fact that approximately one-third of the respondents were from outside the United States. Students' communication abilities are likely to improve with enough instruction and practice, according to the findings.

Efforts by academic institutions for imparting soft skills

Students were surveyed to learn about the resources available to them to hone their soft skills at their individual schools. About 54% of students reported that academic courses frequently include soft skills. Another 47% of students said they had attended credit courses aimed at honing their soft skills prior to taking the survey. These credit courses included

Business Communication, Strategic Management, Team Building, Leadership and Team-Biasing; Management Communication; Effective Communication; Fundamental Communication; Creative Problem-solving; and Strategic Thinking.

Additionally, the universities of the participating students were giving a wide range of chances for their students to improve their soft skills, including specialized soft skills development credit courses. Survey respondents were presented with a list of such events, prepared through interviews with business students and their school administrators, in order to determine their engagement level. Other than the 'students coffee sessions,' less than 20% of students engaged in other programs. Fewer than half of all the



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programs that may assist students improve their soft skills were utilized by the majority of pupils. Business professional courses and courses aimed to improve

specific abilities looked to be widely relied upon by students, while other programs to enhance soft skills appeared to be underutilized..

Table 10. Participation in soft skills development programs (n=187)

Programs/Activities	Never	Rarely	Often
Workshops/ guest talks	11.2 %	70.1 %	18.7 %
Job hunting skills	18.2 %	65.8 %	16.0 %
Company orientation sessions	22.5 %	58.8 %	18.7 %
Career advising sessions	27.8 %	55.6 %	16.6 %
Students coffee sessions	27.8 %	49.2 %	23.0 %

In addition, a series of phrases were utilized to capture students' impressions of the probable benefits of different school-based activities in enhancing their soft skills. These statements showed both positive and negative sides of these programs. More than 61 percent of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with three statements stating that soft skills programs provided them opportunity to obtain hands-on experience, raised their skill levels, and showed ways to apply soft

skills in varied settings (see Table 11). (see Table 11). However, split replies were reported for two items suggesting that content of these soft skills programs were less relevant and cannot be easily implemented into practice. Respondents were more likely to reject than to agree with the claim that these projects were purely theoretical. In other words they believed that talents learned through these programs had their applicability.

Table 11. Perceptions of the benefits of soft skills programs (multiple responses)

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
Provided opportunities for hands-on experience	5	5	54	99	24
Provided me opportunities to boost my soft skills	6	5	57	85	34



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Showed adaptability of soft	3	11	59	92	22
The contents are not so relevant with soft skills improvement	7	45	75	53	7
be easily applied into practice	10	42	77	45	12
Showed the usefulness of soft skills only in theory	19	41	74	37	15

SD: strongly disagree, D: disagree, N: neutral, A: agree, SA: strongly agree

Suggestions for improving students' soft skills

The survey asks for ideas on how institutions might help their students improve their soft skills. More soft-skills development exercises should be introduced into the curriculum, according to a majority of students (see Table 12). Organizing more workshops for developing soft skills and engaging students in hands-on activities were also two of the students' top recommendations. Again, a large majority of the students favored incorporating soft skills training within acceptable professional courses, rather than attending specialized workshops.

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Table 12. Soft skills development measures to be undertaken taken by universities (multiple responses)



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Suggested Measures	Frequency
Incorporate more soft skills development activities into the curriculum	114
Organize more workshops	84
Organize more hands-on activities	81
Arrange more internship programs	75
Organize more company orientation talks	54

In addition, students were asked to provide suggestions for ways to improve their soft skills, which the survey's respondents gladly provided. Respondents recommended students attend professional training programs to enhance their soft

skills (see Table 13). In addition, 42% of those polled said that students should get involved in clubs and organizations like the student union that focus on developing their soft skills.

Table 13. Soft skills development measures to be undertaken by students (multiple responses)

Suggested Measures	Frequency
Attend professional training workshops	93
Join hobby clubs providing soft skills development opportunities	79
Participate in activities organized by the student unions	72
Read books and articles on soft skills-related topics	70



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Conclusion

Study participants were surveyed about the value of soft skills in their educational and professional lives. The findings indicated that business management students in India were aware of the relevance of soft skills for employment and professional progression. Many students, on the other hand, believed that their actual soft skills fell short of expectations. Communication skills were also judged to be the least important by students and possibly why they did not try to improve them. Prior studies had found that interpersonal communication abilities were highly sought after by potential employers, and this was a problem. As a result, students must be educated on the value of good communication skills for a successful profession and the best ways to acquire them. Another interesting conclusion was that a large majority of students believed that business courses should include instruction in soft skills as well as hard skills. It's possible that this method was chosen because it allowed pupils to put these skills into practice in a real-world context. In certain cases, they may not have the time or desire to participate in university-sponsored soft skill development programs since they are already overburdened with professional courses. Since the desired soft skills should be incorporated into the curricula of business and other schools, it is necessary.

They should, however, continue to offer specific programs to help students hone their soft-skills abilities as well. The importance of children participating in skill-building programs and activities, such as self-directed reading, should not be underestimated.

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