

## Role of Soft skills in Shaping an Individual's Personality

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### Abstract:

*This paper is the result of an inquiry into the effect the Soft skills will have on a student's life in his college life, as well as the influence they will have on his life afterwards when he becomes a professional. This paper discusses why soft skills are necessary and mandatory, and complements hard skills, which is called a professional's technical qualifications for which a student undergoes rigorous college training. This paper encourages teachers, faculties, and trainers to take individual responsibility for the aspect of training students in Soft Skills, Faculties who teach / train them, as they spend much of their time with them. In engineering colleges in particular, the professors who train students in hard skills are in a much better place to efficiently combine soft skills with hard skills, thereby generating a power-packed module that forms the personality of the students. At the other hand, students are also responsible for this scenario, as they are more focused on gaining technical skills, putting Soft Skills in the backseat. They only know this when the time to put is close. The output is a better professional and superior human being if both are blended together. What it takes is a bit of extra effort from the faculty side, a bit of consideration from the parent's side, and a bit more effort from the student side. We all know that cure is better than prevention. Soft skills have to be embedded in early childhood and otherwise, in teen years, instead of being an asset, she / he becomes a liability to both parents and the nation. Unless caution is not taken forthwith, we might have a nation of cultureless, less trained zombies looking for jobs.*

**Key words:** *Soft skills training, hard skills, technical skills, communication skills, teachers, education*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Both employers and administrators have been arguing for a long time that the newcomers from College / university fresh graduates lack of Social Skills and are unemployed. Schools, on the one hand, throw the burden on the parents to teach them Soft Skills and then send them back from school and parents place the ball back in the school accusing them for charging exorbitant fees and for lack of training their wards are given in Soft Skills[1]. This escalates into a situation where the colleges blame parents and parents on the other hand believe they have paid the college a heavy amount of fees and it is their responsibility to teach Soft Skills to the students. The consequence of this whole altercation is that everybody is trying to move the buck to the other, and as a consequence; the students are the sufferers. In Etiquette & Soft Skills, they are really far behind. The ability to communicate properly in the English language and to express their views correctly and clearly is mostly missing amongst Soft Skill[2].

Today, in relation to hard skills, students are academically qualified and outstanding but severely lack abilities such as 'teamwork,' 'leadership,' quantitative aptitude, and verbal reasoning.' The German Engineering Association (VDI) recommended that at least 20 per cent of the engineering curricula be dedicated to soft skills more than 40 years ago. Soft skills as well as knowledge of a few cultures and foreign languages should be available to students from universities. The situation has now deteriorated further around the globe. Comparing students' soft skills from two different Engineering streams can be assessed and considered similar to an Aboriginal man's. At the other hand, however, in Soft Skills, students of literature, sciences, or commerce are best called. This fact was established by the English scientist C. P. [3] Snow in his very famous speech entitled "The Two Cultures," in which he defined that students inculcate the Soft Skills because of the nature of the courses. He stressed that non-technical courses and programs typically place more emphasis on soft skills or that the courses themselves are directly linked to soft skills.

### **What does Soft Skill really mean?**

This is a million dollar question and needs to be clarified before even discussing Soft Skills

importance. The reason it is difficult to answer this question is because the perception of 'what is Soft Skill? 'Whatever scenario changes. There is also a thin line drawn between Soft and Hard abilities. Sometimes a topic or subject may be considered as a Soft Skill in one area, but in another subject, it may come under the hard skill area. And to top it off, the perspective varies widely as to what should be known as Soft Ability. In addition to this combat, Soft Ability varies from culture to culture, place to place to hierarchy. In countries such as India, where a variety of cultures exist, a mechanical engineer does not need to have the knowledge of cultural awareness while it is a 'must- know' for a human resource manager or a manager of public relations. It is a sad situation that people are always in the dark with respect to the Soft skills boundary[4]. The "Wikipedia" online encyclopedia gives a very broad definition of soft skills, which leaves much room for discussion: *“Soft skills refer to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, and facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job.”* (Wikipedia, 2007)

**Table 1:** Examples of Soft skills

1. Common Sense	2. Good attitude	3.ommunication skills
4.Group Discussion	5.Etiquette & Manners.	6. Body Language
7.Cooperation &Team skills	8. Adaptability.	9. Flexibility.
10. Follow rules / Instructions.	11. Initiative	12. Responsibility
13. Reliability.	14. Honesty.	15. Integrity
16. Dependability.	17. Work ethics.	18. Punctuality
19. Grooming	20. Accountability	21. Interpersonal Skills
22.Intrapersonal skills	23.Motivational skills	24.Creative thinking skills

25.Problem Solving Ability	26. Public Relations	27.Willingness to learn
28.Time Management	29.Prioritizing Tasks.	30.Performance Excellence
31. Commitment	32. Ability to meet deadlines	33.Listening Skills
34. Judgment	35.Leadership skills	36.Decision Making
37. Self-directed / Motivated.	38.Presentation Skills	39.Change Management
40.Project Management	41. Eye contact.	42.Self-Supervising
43.Personal energy	44.Personal hygiene	45.Intellectual Ability
46. Sociability	47. Empathy	48.Business management
49.Negotiating skills	50.Cultural awareness	

Table 1 above lists some of the Soft Skills considered to be global. That is by far incomplete, though. Might add more and the list will go even longer.

If we review the examples given in Table 1, we can clearly see that we have reduced ourselves to three ability categories-namely:

- Attributes which can be learned as skills and expertise.
- Competencies which relate to many within one person.
- Skills or qualities present in the individual

Under Soft Skills many people have certifications and academic achievements. Such accomplishments cannot be included, because they are subject to educational or professional

qualifications[3]. A person can earn a certificate after taking a Soft Skills course, but no institution or individual can claim that a person has Soft Skills because they have to be learned and are by definition intrinsic. People can only feel the effect of the Soft skills that a person is putting into practice. Describing how a person should put Soft Skills into action would make this article too lengthy and is nearly impossible as too many topics need to be explained in a way that everyone understands. So we will restrict the scope of this article to only two categories

- Competencies which relate to many within one person.
- In-person skills or abilities

### **What are the Soft Skills that hold more significance?**

Here we would repeat that each individual has his or her own perception of and depends on Soft Skills. Needless to say, if we think about soft skills, the first thing that automatically comes to mind is – communication skills because that's the ability that most students of all ages and categories lack. It extends from colleges to universities and even to basic educational institutions on a limited scale. Most aren't even able to adequately describe communication skills or are dissatisfied with the description. The basic question that was asked by a university chancellor to the department of Communication & Soft Skills in a staff meeting. “What is Communication Skill?” The most common answer was – “The English language.” The correct answer came from a person from another department which was not accepted by the Communication & Soft Skill people. His clear cut definition was – “*Communication skill is a skill where the message is transmitted in such a way that the receiver receives it in a way the sender intended it to be.*” This is the level of ignorance of people in the Communication and Soft Skill departments of most colleges working in the Soft Skills. No wonder, both Communication and Soft Skills are severely lacking for the students. We need to find a way to develop the individual's attributes / competencies. That is important since these skills are learned by the students. Their application is almost difficult to track because the student is not always with the faculty / teacher[1].

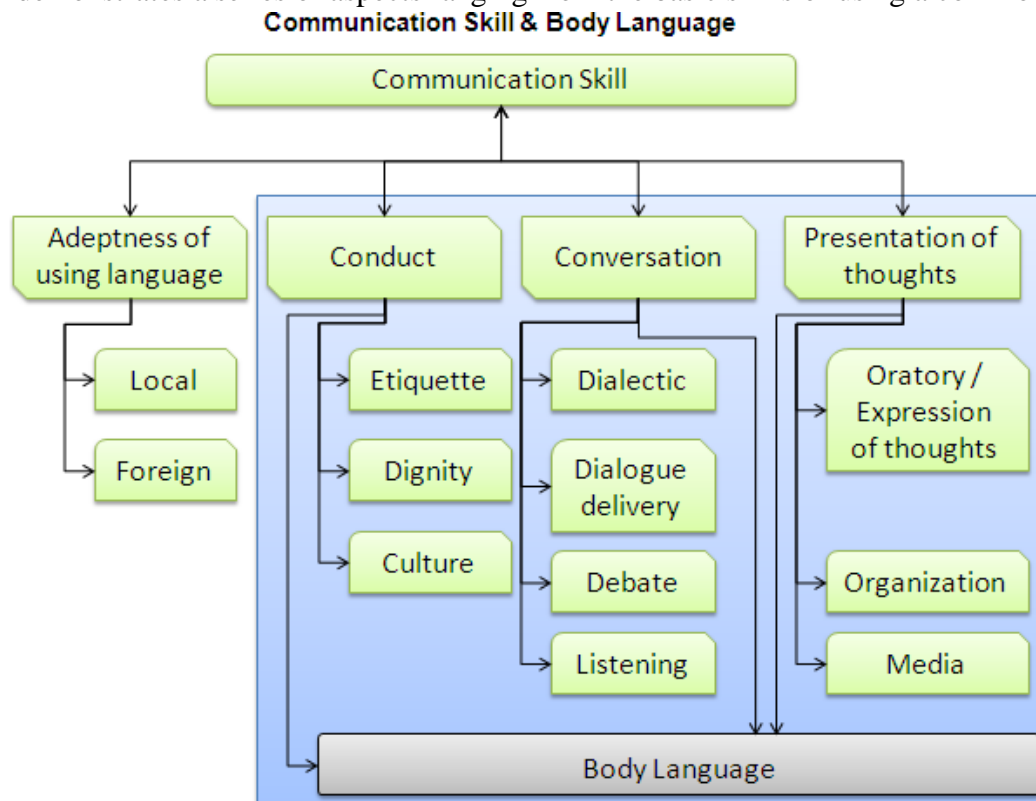
So far we would be venturing to suggest that parents should receive regular training in Soft Skill and should be asked to monitor their children and report back to the faculty, not police. We all agree it will be a herculean task but at the same time it would give us the desired results in a short time. In

addition, soft skill training should start at primary school level, and should continue until graduation or at least until graduation[2]. Nearly all educational institutions require the students to pay more attention to technical subjects and leave Soft Skills training to the parents. Most parents and faculties, in turn, are ignorant of the fact that Soft Skills exist at all. My interaction with one parent regarding his wards' lack of Soft Skills had me shocked. His reply was – “If my son is well mannered and displays proper Soft Skills, he will be termed as a wimp by his peers and my relatives. I want him to be brash and look like a macho man[3].

That is what will enable him to command respect in the society.” No wonder, students Soft Skills are deteriorating day by day. The parents need to be trained in Soft Skills first. If Soft Skills are to be inculcated in an person, we need to look at the important factors shaping his character as well as his skills of communication. Next, we should look onto the reasons how one can communicate properly because, communication is the first thing that a newborn does when it comes out from the mother's womb[4]. Body language is the second aspect that lets people know what they want, or their feelings about a specific feeling or event.

**Figure 1:** An overview of essential factors shaping a person’s communication skills.

Figure 1 demonstrates a series of aspects ranging from the basic skills of using a common language,



which might not be taken for granted in multilingual societies such as India where each state has its own language on advanced topics such as dialectic or oratorical skills[4]. Minimum standards for a college or university graduate should be that the student should be competent in both spoken and written languages, a certain amount of modesty that should represent appropriate communication skills in speech as well as in body language, so that he can contribute to a communication subject. He should be able to communicate his ideas properly with creative skills. Communication skills, however, are not only important for his career and professional development, but contribute much more to his social status or abilities. At his place of employment, strong social skills are expressed, and therefore his career is continued recursively. All these are interconnected and interwoven in the very fabric of our lives, so long as we practice these skills, as the old saying goes “practice makes perfect.”

Nonetheless, the question gets more and more complex as we dig further into communication skills. Language literacy in the English speaking world is the ability to speak, read, and write Standard English in a manner in which business people communicate. One may have the 'hard' ability to know what use is right and what is wrong, but lack the 'soft' ability to know when and in what tone to use standard forms only (Waggoner, 2002). In this definition our basic Soft Skill “Communication Skills” itself is divided into a “soft” and a “hard” part[2]. We may also go further to suggest that communication skills are a requirement for a variety of other soft skills such as dispute resolution or management. However if a disagreement is resolved, syllable stress, tone of voice and the nature of language we use play a significant role.

Today, the planet is a planet powered by data and the constant stream of data comes our way every day. Our brains should be trained to filter out essentially unnecessary garbage data and retain only data that can be converted to information, and make informed decisions with excellent efficiency. This needs logical or systematic thought this goes hand in hand with problem-solving capabilities. Analytical skills and 'thinking outside the box' also play a vital role in our professional and private life and are equivalent to Soft Skills. Creativity abilities are also part of Soft Skills, but they don't mean it's the least important in our lives. People think creative can only be artists, musicians and lyricists. None of this can be further from the facts. Discussion, arguments and debates, and mind mapping are well-known applications of corporate innovation.

### **Why are Soft Skills so crucial?**

We have been discussing Soft Skills a lot and the answer is still pending as to why they are of great importance to an individual. There are one million reasons for us to take a serious look at the Soft Skills of a person now.

The single-shot reason for this is the current work market. There are quite a lot of job seekers and too few jobs. The Indian firm claims the new generation is unemployable because they have little to no Soft Skills. Only the fittest succeed, and to be the fittest, we need the 'cutting- edge' technological training and a 'competitive edge' that distinguishes you as the best choice for the job over those with similar credentials and comparable assessment performance[1]. And where is that competitive advantage for the candidates? Having you stand out from the rest of the crowd is by strengthening your experience and putting up positive personal characteristics and behaviors. Young people



nowadays often think that after completing their tertiary education they can easily secure a job because they are considered 'professionals.' Thirty years ago, at the same time, school leavers and graduates did not have many difficulties in work searching because jobs usually came knocking on their doors. During the job interview itself, good communication skills are invaluable, anyway. If the candidate is less qualified or has no substance on the 'hard skill' side, then good soft skills' can be a great cover-up for him. We have seen people not to be named who are super smooth talkers with results. Then there are benefits of possessing desirable qualities such as courtesy, integrity, versatility, common sense, perfect presentation, etc[3]. during a work interview that are not even to be addressed. They are mandatory in every job regardless of rank.

A candidate never progresses to top this, because; the executive of Human Resource never offers an honest input. Each rejected candidate is told he has soft qualities that can be considered pathetic. Some trashy reason is given such as-" Your qualifications do not match our requirements[1,2]. "Such misleading or vague reasons are of no help to the candidate. Instead, if a proper and real reason is given such as-" Your body language display tells us you were unsure of the answer you gave, and you had problems expressing yourself clearly during the group discussion and presenting yourself in a convincing way. This form of clear cut assessment can sound harsh at first glance; but such feedback will help the candidate develop his / her style with other companies in the future.

Once the candidate succeeds in finding a job, he has to master the Soft Skills to enhance his career opportunities. After, finding a job, candidates think on how to EARN, they never think about adding an "L" before "EARN" i.e. on how to LEARN. A fact that in our daily lives can be verified is that employers promote employees with their Soft Skills who are better off. People with good hard qualifications are no longer on the list first. Soft Skills complement hard skills and are given priority in the business world at present.

### **Can Soft Skills be acquired?**

We have already identified two ways to improve our Soft Skills. The first way to become enrolled in a rhetoric, languages, presentation skills, conflict or cultural management training course on Soft Skills. This is a well-proven concept with the advantage that at the end of the course you have some

kind of certificate. Most people are only going through this preparation for the credential because it would come in handy for career advancement or work jumping. The slender sarcasm in the last sentence is intentional, as it is not always assured that a certain course effectively improved the Soft Skills of a individual unless & unless it is practiced diligently.

The second way to acquire Soft Skills is through self-training through books, and is the most useful because an individual trains themselves because he wants to move forward in life. He knows he will be the one to be blamed for the failure, if he doesn't practice. Since the emergence of the Web, content for Soft Skills is quickly available on the net. It goes without saying, of course, that you would have to filter out some unnecessary things, since there is also a lot of unwanted information on the internet.

A sure way to train yourself in Soft Skills is to start by socializing with friends, colleagues, peers and other society members. Start by engaging in small talk in an informal way to improve communication skills on topics such as; language skills, listening, discussing, self-esteem, overcoming stage fear, body language, etiquette and manners etc. The list is potentially infinite.

### **What can the educators / lecturers / teachers do to enhance their student's Soft Skills?**

The first step is for the educational institutions to understand the students ' needs to gage their vulnerabilities and then take action to patch them up with the training needed. We do need to increase the students' understanding of the value of Soft Skills, and do each and every student's SWOT analysis. For this reason specialists will be recruited. Students should be encouraged to read books based on developing Soft Skills, attend training classes, engage in conversations, and socialize with peers. During seminar sessions every student should be encouraged to present a subject of their choice.

A time with a given syllabus should be added as a topic as an addition to this. Students at school level may be expected to do a study and present a paper or a small write-up and submit the results within a given time. A Soft Skill class can be arranged at higher learning institutes with topics such as leadership skills, listening skills or writing skills, cross cultural conflicts, problem solving can be

introduced[2]. These activities are well received by students and studying for them generally turns out to be enjoyable.

Universities and colleges which already have department of Soft Skill have another problem. The technical courses faculties have an ego equal to the size of an elephant. They believe they do all the hard work in training the students to become achievers and the faculties of Communication and Soft Skills take away all the accolades after placing the student. True concern with respect to the candidate's future is never seen. This can be turned into a big scoring point with a bit of critical thought in the planning and course implementation. An elegant way to give Soft Skills training is to be embedded in the technical faculty's teaching methodology which teaches the subject, i.e. hard skill course. Therefore no changes need to be made to the curriculum of the program but the changes are reflected in the methodology of teaching. For example, a faculty which teaches thermodynamics will be an example. He will schedule a lecture by deciding what Soft Skills he / she wishes to develop on that day, and then decide how to organize the appropriate subject material to achieve this aim. It goes without saying, of course, that the faculty must first be trained in Soft Skills, and let them choose the methodology and then practice it with the help of a Soft Skills trainer. It is a technique in due course that they must immediately pursue thus growing the students' soft skills manifold.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, we can say that Soft Skills is of supreme importance and people who don't have them will be out of work soon. To acquire Soft Skills beyond academic or technical knowledge one has to take the trouble. Soft skills are gaining importance in all work sector areas. Faculties have a significant role to play here by imparting their respective courses using Soft Skills, while at the same time ensuring that their students learn Soft Skills during their time at the University. It is high time that the teachers, lecturers and faculty modified their approach in the delivery of education. That applies to schools, colleges, universities and parents alike. This is the duty of all to ensure at all times that good hygiene, courtesy and soft skills are practiced. That would be a better place to live in this country. If each person contributes his / her bit, the society will significantly improve on the whole, thereby contributing to world peace in a big way.

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3. Wikipedia: [www.en.wikipedia.com](http://www.en.wikipedia.com)
4. [www.softskills.com](http://www.softskills.com)
5. [www.softskillsindia.com](http://www.softskillsindia.com)