

# A Study of Soft Skills to be Instilled Within Management Students

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## **Abstract:**

Modern organizations in today's challenging & fast-paced technocrat environment require a variety of skills like – technical, cognitive, interpersonal, social, hard & soft skills etc. to smoothly carryout complex business activities. In today's digital age, where internet is utilized by the organizations as a sole / alternate channel to compete globally – has actually created a demand urgency for new skill-sets. Such skill-sets contribute towards the country's economic development. The challenges of dealing with rapid technological changes has become a matter of grave concern for employers. They have expressed dissatisfaction by raising eyebrows over the skill-quality of fresh graduates. Latest reports have highlighted that students in academia are trained only on technical topics related to their field of career / discipline and there is a minimal or equivalent to no efforts on soft skills development. As a result, many management degree holders are facing employment challenges due to lack of industry-ready talent and skills required for that job. It is essential for students to enhance their skills. New / established institutes required to polish students with soft skills are in high demand & need from both industry & general public perspective since they are important for student's employability & success. Changing times have raised the need for nurturing current education standards through cultivation; thereby, enhancing current education curriculum with soft-skills development initiative. These skills would parallelly help in overall personality development of a student. This will equip students with not just good computer skills, but also enhance their communication & problem-solving skills, shape up their ability to demonstrate good leadership qualities, make strategic & long-term plans to achieve departmental / organizational goals, initiate fast decision-making in tensed & ever-changing environment juggling for success, and develop strong work ethics etc.. In order to fully utilize our manpower resources, one of the key solutions is to yield the needed amount of highly skilled manpower at an increased pace. Hence, an alarming issue – which is important from the point of view of further research. This paper primarily focuses on development of soft skills – a management student must bear in order to meet industry standards.

**Keywords: Soft Skills, Employment, Management Students, HR**

## **Introduction:**

Young & innovative minds is what makes up for a progressive nation. Therefore, the 'soft-skills', in addition to multiple skill-sets in youth, is of a primary essence for the economic growth & development of a country. In today's modern digital age; where organizations working in a global environment, there is an increasing demand to instill soft-skills within younger generation graduating from business schools, as a requirement from corporate organizations / agencies. Today's employers eye the skill-quality of graduates not par with industry standards. The fresher skills do not tailor the industry standards. To smoothly carryout complex business activities, organizations require wider range of skills like – technical, cognitive, interpersonal, social, hard & soft skills etc. Degrees / diplomas awarded by eminent institutes / prestigious universities lack in quality assurance structures.

Therefore, there is a need for supreme structural changes within institutions. Students have to be encouraged to develop skills in a way that makes them a valuable resource for the hiring organizations. Soft skills play an important role in the overall personality development of a student. Lack of 'soft-skills' development initiative is a major problem in our country's education system – due to which even through the students are given the best of training & internship projects, good knowledge of field study, hard skills, and developing impressive resumes, but still can't manage to get better jobs. Therefore, there is a need to enhance the country's education system with soft-skills development initiative programme – which can parallelly help in shaping up the overall personality development of youngsters seeking job.

Management students have to play a role of a leader, communicator, motivator, planner, liasor, negotiator, etc. They will have to be motivated and directed towards analyzing the soft skills they will require for better employment and career opportunities. A degree will show only good qualification and marks, but their soft skills will disclose their overall personality. To compete in this competitive environment and gain a good career move ahead, they will to have good soft skills for long term. It is true, that if anyone want to succeed in proper management, learning should be as fast as change.

Soft skills are more than a degree on paper. It includes a process that exhibits changing complementarities. Educating students on the basis of theoretical knowledge must be implemented parallelly with soft-skills development for better prospects & career.



Source - Own Creation

Combination of 'Soft-skills' and 'Education' results in a better career opportunities and employability. Our education system needs to improve the way of 'learning' and 'performing'. 'Soft-skills' are vital for the fresher's seeking entry-level jobs in the global markets. A dual interaction of corporate & academia to put up the agenda of adding 'Soft-skills Development Initiative' to the 'Academic Curriculum' for the betterment & grooming of individual students to become better managers, better competitors & rulers of global market is a great initiative. Such meetings must be held on regular intervals. Gaining employability skills and career readiness, is what employers want. Such skill development would enhance the quality of skilled workforce in the organizations. This will benefit student in the following ways:

- Personal growth & development
- Increased employment opportunities
- Increased knowledge & understanding of local industry

'Soft skills' include communication & interpersonal skills, problem solving, time management, life skills & leadership skills. Students exposed to 'soft-skills' sessions have an edge with regard to employability & overall personality development. For effective performance in various activities, 'soft-skills' need to be instilled in an individual. Hard skills include technical skill and an ability to perform tasks, 'soft-skills' are applicable around various job & different job titles and organizations. It is often said that 'hard-skills' may get an interview, but an individual requires 'soft-skills' to perform better at the job. Hard skills explain you the concepts, whereas soft skills help you in adapting work environment. Therefore, it becomes essentially important that these skills be instilled within management students, so that literate resources can be converted into skilled resources.

#### Review of Literature:

With limited natural resources and increasing population, India's principle resource is its own people. Therefore, it becomes necessary to impart quality skills among people. According to **Hanushek, A (1979)**, Skill development is considered to be the chief symbol of quality education. Skills related to any subject will lead to knowledge gain and familiarity with a subject. There is a need for change in curriculum of management students to perform effectively and face the global competition. **Durrani, M (2001)** suggested skills like Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Co-ordination skills for future, that world requires. For proper skill development, institutions need to work hard on structure. "To develop the overall skills of the students in a positive way, the course curriculum will have significant impact on the quality of institutes." (**Glewwe, P. 2002**).

**Thornton & Perreault (2004)** defined that a good manager needs to enhance his personal qualities & attribute with overall skill development; whereas **Bancino & Zevalkink (2007)** explained in their paper that hard core professionals are unemployed due to soft skills. They said that employers want to hire only those having strong soft skills. Soft skills includes effective communication skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills, an appreciation for trust, diversity, honesty, ethics, and integrity. Many studies have concluded that possessing these skills are important for high performing organizations to retain workforce successfully. With the dynamic environment, technological change is the main reason for the employers demand towards communication and presentation skills from management students (**Mitchell et. al, 2010**). According to **Agarwal, P (2011)** - India has the highest number of educated people, but they lack in employment. Here, students leave education without proper learning skills. **Nealy, C (2011)** reported that teachers will have to evolve from dispenser of information & knowledge to facilitators & enablers of learning. More emphasis is given on passing exam rather than acquiring skills – which is the need of tomorrow.

According to **McGrath, S (2012)** – "literacy, numeracy & life skills are basic skill required for proper student growth". Management students seeking employment after their degree must ensure that their skills match with the employers requirement and develop those that are still missing. Quality of Skill Development is a base for student growth. Quality depends on strength & weakness of institutes. Students might be educated but are unemployed because industries do not consider them as productive resources. (**Okada, A. 2012**)

However, researchers such as **Robles (2012)** have reported that "even though management students have full command over subject and theoretical aspects, they lack in performing effectively with full efficiency due to lack of soft skills". "Soft skills like communication, interpersonal and critical thinking – plays a vital role in higher level management and leadership positions in the workplace" (**Bedwell et. al, 2013**). According to **Ramos, F (2014)** - there are various courses taught in universities – that focus

more on generic knowledge which is not enough for a youth to start his career and work effectively as a team in workplace. Various researchers have emphasized on the need of soft skills for upcoming employees.

To grab some new opportunities, students need to develop extra quality skills other than their theoretical subject knowledge. This review of the literature around 21st century skills advice that educational decision makers require to acknowledge that the academics of past are not sufficient for today. Few studies have also gathered performance (test) evidence on the impact of providing workplace basic 'soft-skills' training. Therefore, building & developing 'soft-skills' is of utmost importance for better opportunities in the global marketplace.

### Objectives of the Study:

The basic objectives of this paper are –

- ✓ To identify the types of soft-skills required by the employers
- ✓ To highlight the importance of soft skills for management students
- ✓ To suggest suitable measures & strategy for providing the 'soft-skills' to management students.

### Research Methodology:

This study is more descriptive in nature. It is based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data was collected through personal interview of employers, HR managers, students and academicians. Secondary data was useful in knowing about the research already done in the area and to identify the gap / limitation – to carry on further research. The relevant books, documents of ministries/ departments, papers & articles will be studied in order to gain familiarity with the needs of employers from the young aspirants applying for job.

### Results & Findings:

The research study clearly indicates that 'soft-skills' are the vital requirements & in demand by the hiring organizations, that need to be instilled within management students for a better & progressive career. There are various initiatives and measures being taken by the institutions, organizations and the government for the effective implementation of the 'soft-skills' development in youth. 'Soft-skills' are generally associated with student's emotional intelligence. It involves personality, language, communication, interpersonal & management skills. Need for 'soft-skills' from management students has emerged to be a major challenge for academic institutions & corporate organizations / agencies.

### 'Soft-skills' required by the employers:

1. **Communication Skills** – Fluency in language with good confidence is the key 'soft-skill' that an organization expects from a fresher belonging to the 'Management' stream. This includes verbal and written language. It can be improved by getting academia to have students analyze case studies, and conduct oral presentations etc..
2. **Leadership Skills** – Young creative minds must possess good leadership qualities. This helps working with employees effectively & efficiently. It includes the ability to motivate others to work in a particular direction, trustful environment and positivity all around.
3. **Analytical/Strategic Thinking Skills** – Every management student must have strategic thinking skill to see future as a 'big picture'. They should have the ability to analyze the circumstances and behave accordingly. This is the most important and among top demands of employers
4. **Delegation Skills** – Every management student must possess skills to delegate tasks to the employees or their team-members i.e. effectively assigning task, taking responsibilities and give authority to others.
5. **Teamwork Skills** – Teamwork skills are essential for working in organizations. They need to have positive attitude to work with people in same workplace or outside. This will help them in building team spirit and better work environment with highly motivated employees
6. **Adaptability Skills** – Such skills help in adjusting with the changing circumstances and work environment. Organizations are in need of such candidates who can flexibly adapt to changes without any resistance
7. **Life Skills** – Skills like taking challenges, setting goals, decision making, problem solving, practicing wellness are some life skills. These skills enables them to perform well in any situation of life
8. **Interpersonal Skills** – Such skills improves your ability to work with others and engage with them. They are generally needed in leadership roles, where working as a good leader can lead to success or failure
9. **Entrepreneurial Skills** – These type of skills help individuals think out-of-the-box and explore new creative ideas. They gain ability to take judgement in dynamic environment with new business challenges
10. **Conflict Management Skills** – To have quality of solving problems and compromising to accommodate others. These skills help in addressing problems before they reach crisis stage and solve them.

There are some others soft skills that also holds a good position in the list, like – anger management skills, negotiation skills, email etiquette, visualizing skills, operational thinking, valuing others, etc. Soft skills help change one's attitude, perception and behavior while working professionally.

**Importance of 'soft skills' for management students:**

Soft-skills are of great importance to management students. It has been analyzed that employers are in need of management professionals who have a 'winner' attitude. Organizations like IBM, Google, Apple, Infosys, Reliance, Wipro, Ogilvy etc. – consider soft skills (like leadership, communication and interpersonal skills) as a key to their managerial success. Today, the 'Management' stream have applicants not only from the 'Commerce' field, but also 'Engineering', 'Science', 'Architecture' and other backgrounds. Every field is now getting attracted towards the 'Management' education. With the rise in graduates numbers in 'Management' field, the skill quality of the fresh job-seekers in 'Management' field have also declined. The employers have expressed dissatisfaction over the skill quality of fresher's due to the lack of 'soft-skills'. Importance of soft skills for 'Management' students can be realized from the following points –

- Employment opportunities increases when students have 'soft' skills.
- Possibility of personal growth when students have 'entrepreneurial' & 'creative thinking' skills
- It increases opportunities to develop career in a new direction
- 'Soft-skills' give them a knowledge and better way of understanding local industry
- It help in finding new ways of thinking and problem solving
- Develop a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation for others
- 'Soft-skills' gives confidence to crack interviews and present themselves in a better way
- Perform effectively in workplace and be a good team-player

**Measures & Strategy for providing 'soft skills' to management students:**

Employers expect from the candidates to be enthusiastic, numerate, literate and be able to respond on time. They do not expect them to have fully developed skills required at workplace, but should at least have some 'soft skills'. Lack of communication, literacy, employability skills etc. generally results in shifting from one job to another. The various measures through which various soft skills can be instilled within management students are -

1. By conducting seminars for 'soft-skills' training, there will be a better interaction between trainers & students and they will manage to learn & possess presentation skills
2. Conducting frequent workshops may provide fresher's an opportunity to enhance their global skills
3. 'In-basket' training can help visualize the future scenario
4. 'Conferences' and 'Group-discussions' are good options to reshape their critical thinking and business aptitude. It will help promote innovative thinking and fast decision-making
5. Team training methods can be used to develop inter-disciplinary management skills
6. 'Role playing' method and 'Management games' method can help implement learning process effectively and practice new techniques. It helps in facing real-life problems in organizations.
7. 'Brainstorming' is an effective way of encouraging students to think creatively and achieve goals by gathering ideas
8. Skilled courses can be added in curriculum like – 'Work ethics & personality development'
9. 'Faculty development' programme can be conducted to train the trainers for their overall improvement. This will help in imparting knowledge in an effective way and in appropriate direction
10. Courses to enhance English proficiency of weak students
11. Making teaching more practice-oriented
12. For technology-aided communication and interaction, building of technological aids is required

**Conclusion:**

With integration of 'soft-skills' development, the curriculum of education system needs to be considered for proper growth and development. Students entering the workforce should also be encouraged to build skill-sets like – Resume Writing, Email etiquette, Public Speaking & Time Management. 'Soft-skills' helps in empowerment of management students. There are various institutes that offer management courses / diploma all over the country, but they lack 'soft-skill' development initiative. The main problem is some of them lack skilled faculties, class management, proper practical learning, role playing, assignments, case-studies, regional language, communication skills, opportunities etc. For a suitable job and promotion, management students must be motivated to develop 'soft-skills'. This will equip students with not just good computer skills, but also enhance their communication & problem-solving skills, shape up their ability to demonstrate good leadership qualities, make strategic & long-term plans to achieve departmental / organizational goals, initiate fast decision-making in tensed & ever-changing environment juggling for success, and develop strong work ethics etc.. In order to fully utilize our manpower resources, one of the key solutions is to yield the needed amount of highly skilled manpower at an increased pace. Since management education has become a common career option for most of the students, there is a need to add a 'soft-skill' development programme to the course curriculum. Attractive packages and growth in corporate life has motivated young fresher's to opt this field as a career option in their higher education –where they study many core subjects like accountancy, finance, HR, marketing etc, but they fail when they apply for the jobs. They compete for good scores during two years at management colleges and are unable to develop their life skills required for employability. The major reason behind their failure is their communication and other soft skills to handle daily business operations & activities. There is an urgent requirement for the institutes to include soft skills in their curriculum which will enhance a sudden change in the level of pass outs from their institutes. As the real world is different than the knowledge gained in the colleges, it is important for the students to gain some soft skills for future. The analyzed soft skills for management students are interpersonal skills, leadership skills, conflict management skills, strategic skills, adaptability skills, presentation and decision making skills, etc. Soft skills can be instilled within management students by brainstorming, role

playing, seminars, conferences, case studies, workshops, adding of soft skill courses, etc to gain familiarity with work conditions. These will not only lead to growth and development of individuals, but also in increasing efficiency of businesses.

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