



Soft Skills for Sustainable Employment: Does it really Matter?

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ABSTRACT

A tremendous change has occurred in the professional world of learning. In order to develop a knowledge-based economy, a growing awareness about the importance of proper higher education has transpired in Bangladesh. Evidence from contemporary literature suggests that Soft Skill Attributes contribute to the sustainable employment of the business graduates significantly. This paper is based on descriptive and inferential research. The study has tried to identify the top ten Soft Skill attributes frequently asked by the employers among the potential candidates to attain and sustain the employments for business graduates in Bangladesh. It is found in this paper, that most of the employers search for the soft skill attributes like Communication Skill (Both Verbal & Writing), Interpersonal Skill, Ability to work under pressure, Team Player, Analytical Ability, Self-Motivated, Deadline-Oriented/Target Oriented, Leadership Skill, Problem Solving Ability, Proactive, etc. The study also opens avenue for further research in this field implementing training program for attaining most desired soft skills among the higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS: Business graduate, Employer, Soft skills, Sustainable Employment, Workplace

I. INTRODUCTION

Soft Skills are career attributes, which are difficult to both master and measure, such as capacity to communicate, solve problems, work under pressure, team skill, leadership skill, time management skill, ethics, etc. Today soft skills popularly referred to as employability skill. Employers deem soft skills as employability skills owing to the fact they are needed to have a harmonious relationship with co-workers and customers. An employee's job performance and career success are contingent on the effective utilization of soft skills. The grounds of this study is to investigate the top ten soft skills frequently asked by the employers for enhancing the employability of business graduates of Bangladesh. In this era of globalization, there is a problem of employability due to the lack of soft skills. Soft skills help students to improve personal qualities, habits and attitudes to interact with others.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Defining Soft Skills

Truong and Laura (2015) opined that the development of soft skill as an academic discipline is still under development, and that's why different researchers defined it differently. The researchers (Truong and Laura 2015) defined it as, 'an array of personal skills such as the capacity

to communicate, and problem-solve, and possess leadership qualities, and the ability to work well in a team, be amicable, and a good listener'. According to Han (2013), a skill to be considered as a soft skill must have three characteristics, which are: the skill is portable and valuable to any job, rules for mastering this skill is not black and white and mastering it is an ongoing journey.

As defined by Mitchell et al. s (2010), 'Soft skills describe career attributes that individuals should possess, such as team skills, communication skills, ethics, time-management skills, and an appreciation for diversity'. Mar A (2013) defined soft skill as, '[soft skills are those skills that are difficult to measure](#)'. Mar A (2013) also added that, soft skills cannot be measured easily using a test.

According to Seetha (2013), 'soft skill is a sociological term and alternatively known as an individual's emotional intelligence.' Soft Skills can be defined as, 'personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job and career prospects.' Gautam (2014), Seetha (2013).

While many authors equate interpersonal skills with soft skills (James & James, 2004; Perreault, 2004; cited in Robles, 2012), interpersonal skills are only one facet of soft skills. In addition to interpersonal skills, soft skills include personal qualities and career attributes (James & James,

2004; Nieragden, 2000; Perreault, 2004; cited in Robles, 2012).

According to Jolly (2012), the vast range of soft skills includes these seven broad category of skills: Communicative Skills, Critical thinking and problem-solving skills, Team work, Lifelong Learning and Information Management Skills, Entrepreneurship Skills, Ethics Moral & professional, and Leadership skills

Chaudhury et al. (2008) suggest that soft skills can be broadly categorized into the following five perspectives:

- Work environment Perspectives: Cluster of personal qualities, attitude, knowledge, and social graces.
- Intellectual Perspective: Thinking, including abstract, conceptual, strategic, critical thinking, judgment.
- Attitude Perspective: comfort with ambiguity, adaptability and flexibility, motivation and decisiveness.
- Situational Perspective: creativity, innovation, curiosity, intuition.
- Communication and relationship Perspective: interpersonal skills, team spirit, negotiation skills, motivation, time management.

B. Importance in Today's Workplace

In today's competitive marketplace Soft skills are “must have” skills and increasingly demanded by the business leaders. (Bancino et al., 2007). One of the reasons is, an organization's image is reflected through the image presented by employees in that company (Nair & Mukherjee, 2015). The other three driving forces behind business leaders' increasing demand for a variety of skill set, Bancino et al. (2007) continues : need for improving the bottom line; increasing competition; and globalization. Moreover, job performance and career success of an individual largely depends on the effective practice of soft skills (Sangamitra and Priya, 2015)

In recent years, Truong and Laura (2015) researched an impressive amount of literature, relevant to business education which was accumulated from several diverse areas of study and showed that, without the acquisition of “soft skills”, the level of potential success in the context of international trade, business transactions, and production cannot be maximized. Candidates who add value with their soft skills is highly demanded by corporate recruiters (Robles, 2012). The author (Robles, 2012) continues, Soft skills can be viewed as an investment and is very critical in current workplaces.

A research study among top executives of Robles (2012) showed that, 100% of the respondents indicated integrity and communication, 84.2% to courtesy, 71.9% referred to responsibility, and 61.4% reported interpersonal skills as the most important soft skills in the workplace.

C. Employability of Soft Skills

Seetha (2013) indicated that one of the main reasons of low employability among graduates is a lack of mastering the

soft skills. Soft skills are employability skills that are transferrable in many jobs (Robles, 2012). Employability skills are a set of essential skills and behaviors that are immensely necessary for all kind of job.

The term employable skill is often misunderstood by most of the educational institutions and confused by communication skill (Kumar, 2014). Kumar (2014) also added communication skill is just one of the employable skills, not all.

According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), in simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work'. More comprehensively Hillage and Pollard (1998) continues, 'employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment'.

D. Sustainable Employment:

Symons and Lamberton (2014); cited in Nusrat and Soliman (2016) suggest that the sustainability of business is dependent upon the issues like employee welfare, financial matters and most importantly competitive business advantage. According to Bancine and Zevalkink (2007), when nontechnical skills (Soft skills) are developed to complement technical skills, collaboration, synergy, and personal productivity, are increased, which eventually turn into improved business success rates, sustainable competitive advantage and increased profitability.

So, it can be said that, Soft skill attributes (when complimented with technical skills) help business to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, which ensures the sustainability of business, which in turn resulted in sustainable employment.

E. Purpose and Problem Statement

The present study's purpose was to find out the most desired soft skills from the employees by the present day employers, so, that business institutes can encourage their graduate students to master the skills to develop and prepare themselves for the real-life battle in the job market.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to validate the soft skills expected from the employees by the employers (expressed as job requirements for business graduates). The researcher analyzed the job advertisements appearing at two major online job sites (www.bdjobs.com and www.prothomalojobs.com) of Bangladesh in April 2016. Only the jobs which required a degree from the business were analyzed.

The researcher analyzed 3,996 job advertisements, among which 1,615 job's requirement were business degree (BBA/MBA) as educational background. Among those jobs, 415 job vacancies were of entry level, which required either no or less than one year experience. The top ten desired Soft Skill attributes from those advertisements are presented below:

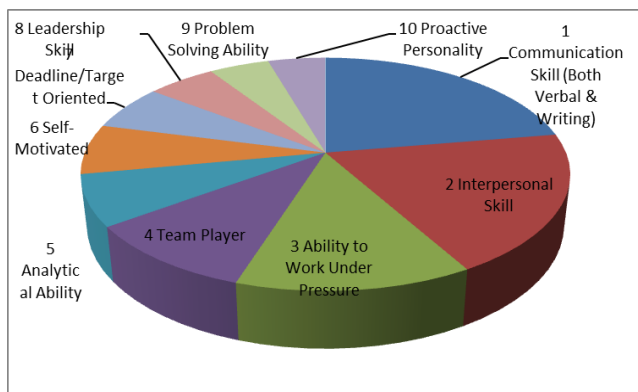


Fig. 1: Top Ten Soft Skill Attributes from the job advertisements

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The apparent significance of soft skill expertise has expanded immensely amid the most recent decades. Since Bangladesh is nearly assembling an knowledge based economy with its plenteous fresh-out graduates, the opportunity has already come and gone to prepare the business graduates with legitimately employable abilities. The discoveries of this paper propose that, the employers of business alumni of Bangladesh expect that their workers will have the delicate abilities, for example, Communication skill, Interpersonal skill, Ability to work under pressure, Team Player, Analytical Ability, Self-motivated, Deadline/Target oriented, Leadership Skill, Problem Solving Ability, Proactive Personality, etc. As a valedictory comment, one might say that when the competitors have such characteristics (delicate aptitudes) complimenting with specialized abilities, the window of chance for practical work develops quickly, and develops the supportability of business.

Recommendations:

The researchers thinks of the accompanying proposals:

- The educational programs of business training ought to guarantee the improvement of soft skills among the understudies.
- The Faculties ought to be careful while giving addresses so that, it would make the understudies urged and propelled to ace the delicate aptitudes.
- More scholastic research should make in this field to build up a structure of how to ace the delicate abilities all the more deductively.

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