

Communication and soft skills

INTRODUCTION

According to researches conducted in Harvard and Stanford Universities only 15% of your career success is provided by your hard skills, whilst other 85% by so called soft skills. “Soft skills get little respect but will make or break your career” (*Peggy Klaus*).

“Soft Skills” correlates with some terms of a very close meaning: “Life Skills”, “Emotional Intelligence Quotients”, “Social Skills”, and “Interpersonal Skills”.

Soft skills is a term often associated with a person's Emotional Intelligence Quotient, the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills, also known as people skills, complement hard skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and career prospects. It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get – and keep – the job.

WHY SOFT SKILLS?

Self

- An awareness of the characteristics that define the person one is and wants to become.

Opportunity

- An awareness of the possibilities that exist, the demands they make and the rewards and satisfactions they offer.

Aspirations

- The ability to make realistic choices and plans based on sound information and on self-opportunity alignment.

Results

- The ability to review outcomes, plan and take action to implement decisions and aspirations, especially at points of transition (*Kumar, A., 2007*).

In order to **SOAR** students need two things:

To specify of soft skills

- ✓ Discipline specific
- ✓ Placement/employability
- ✓ Preparation
- ✓ Lifelong learners
 - Learning how to learn
 - Reflective practitioners

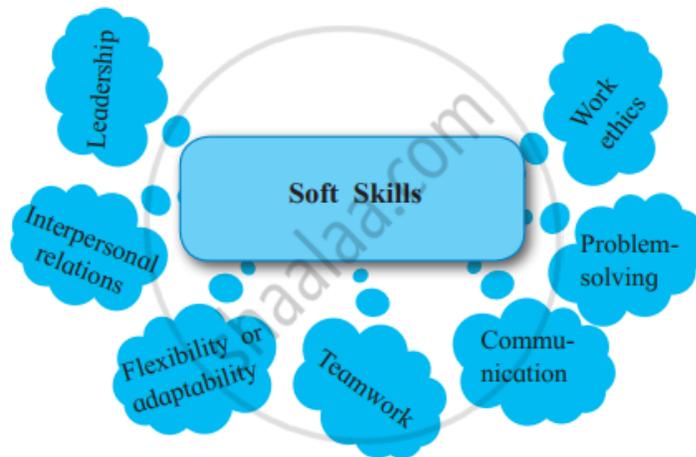
Soft skills categories

Generally soft skills may be classified into three basic categories. They are,

- a) Personal qualities
- b) Inter personal skills
- c) Additional skills/knowledge

Integral parts of soft skills

Self management system consist of self motivation, taking responsibility, task setting/prioritizing, time-management system is depicted in the table below



Critical Thinking:

- «thinking about thinking» (Raiskums, B. W.)
- «this way of thinking, which does not accept the arguments and conclusions blindly, rather, it examines assumptions, recognize hidden values, evaluates the data and conclusions» (Mayers, D.)
- «reasonable reflective thinking, aimed at deciding what to trust and what to do» (Ennis, R.)
- “An expert is a man (*woman*) who has made all of the mistakes which can be made in a very narrow field” (*Bohr, N.*)
- “Imagination is more important than knowledge” (*Einstein, A.*)

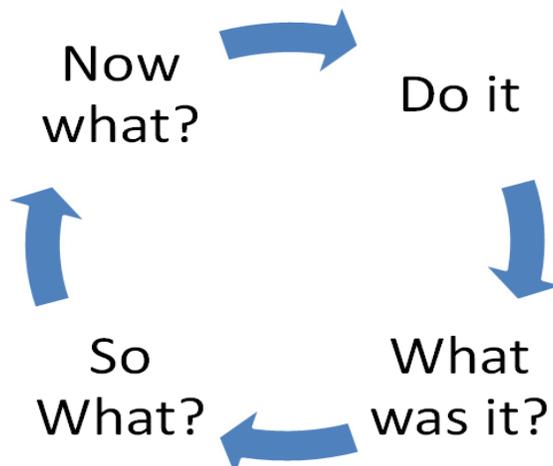
Critical thinking is the ability to question and to cope with uncertainty, without which none of the above would be possible.

Examples of critical thinking

- Experimentation (lap/hypothesis testing)
- Social research, data interruption and explanation
- Creativite problem solving
- Identify the issue
- Come up with alternative solutions
- Learning to cope with uncertainty and embracing it as learning tool

Reflection

Reflection is a form of thinking used to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding that we already possess.



Effective communication provides for high level of ***presentation skills***:

- to increase both skills and confidence levels
- to improve research, design and communication skills
- to develop team working and project management skills
- to strengthen learning and enthusiasm for further knowledge
- to promote critical and analytical thinking.

Communication and interaction:

Communication and interaction is an area of need that focuses on speech, language and communication need that focuses on speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), AND, Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD).

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Skillful writing examples:

- Technical Writing
- Script writing / audience analysis / performance / reflection
- Observation (self and others)
- Press release;
- Sign language qualifications (*Strachan, R., 2010*)

Listening to Others

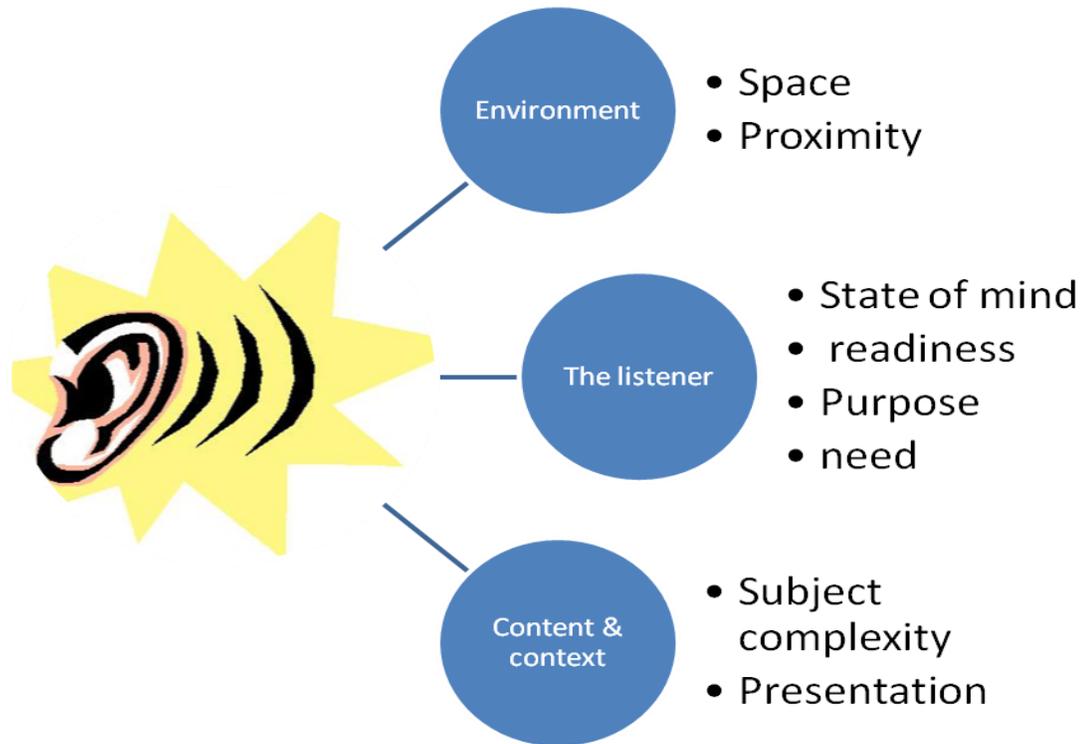


Fig. 9. Listening to Others

The examples of effective listening include:

- Role play
 - Sender / receiver
- Same audience, same message, how many interpretations?
- Constructed conversations

Group Work

Group work is one of the most useful ways of learning about cooperation, shared responsibility, project planning, and time management. Learning how to work successfully in a group has a close association with how we participate in the work place and includes:

- Social responsibility
- Using logical and rational arguments to persuade others
- Identifying the needs of others and building positive relationships
- Understanding group dynamics
- Understanding yourself in relation to others and how they might perceive you.
- Reflection on the image you portray

II. Assertiveness

Assertiveness means “confident behaviour” and “self-confidence”. It is an individual ability to advance and come true own aims, needs, wishes, claims, interest and feelings. Phenomenon of

assertiveness presupposes an existence of: **a)** subjective attitude toward Self (self-allowance to have the own claims); **b)** social readiness and ability to realize it in adequate manner (to have the own claims and achieve their realization); **c)** freedom from social fear and inhibition (ability to register and reveal own claims).



Fig. 11. Assertive Behavior

Assertiveness training helps to:

- recognise the three main categories of behaviours, advantages and disadvantages and how to respond to them
- explore strategies for assertiveness and influence
- understand and use the „Assertiveness Model“ for greater effectiveness
- develop and enhance self confidence and self esteem
- create an action plan to move forward with assertiveness skills

In order to develop assertive behaviour we need to explore how to:

- Create boundaries and say „No“
- Deal with disagreement, conflict and aggressive behaviour
- Negotiate win-win solutions
- Use assertiveness techniques and strategies in a variety of work settings

OUTCOMES OF SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Oral communication skills

Students are able to communicate confidently and effectively with a range of audiences, in a variety of modes or registers and settings, including persuasion, argument and exposition, and they are able to make use of different support tools, including visual, audio-visual and technological.

Interpersonal Skills

Students have the skills to be able to work effectively with a range of people in a range of different contexts, including teams, where they can be effective members and, if required, leaders,

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Interpersonal Skills

Students have the skills to be able to work effectively with a range of people in a range of different contexts, including teams, where they can be effective members and, if required, leaders including organizing team roles and activities. Students are open to the ideas of others. Students are capable of listening and understanding in a range of contexts.

Problem Solving Skills

Students are able to identify and define problems and through the use of skills of analysis and critical evaluation plan an appropriate course of action and devise solutions. Students are able to make judgments concerning different possible solutions. They will be able to make use of creative and lateral thinking.

Organizational Skills

Students are able to set priorities, and anticipate potential problems or needs. They are able to set and achieve targets in relation to both study and workplace tasks. Students are able to manage their time effectively.

With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN (PDP)

Personal Development Plan is a form of summative assessment.

What is PDP? It is „a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development“.

The primary **objective for PDP** is to improve the capacity of individuals to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan, and take responsibility for their own learning, helping students:

- become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners;
- understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context;
- improve their general skills for study and career management;
- articulate personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement;
- and encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life.

PDP Structure:

- What are my development objectives?
- Priority
- What activities do I need to undertake to achieve my objectives?
- What support/resources do I need to achieve my objectives?
- Target date for achieving my objectives

Actual date for achieving my objectives Motivating Staff:

- Ensure that it „fits“ with existing practices & priorities
- E.g. personal/guidance tutor system – avoid duplication of work
- Use to support student retention & achievement

- A reflective approach is something that we already use and value
- PDP need not be something „different“ or „extra“
- „Lifelong learning“ approach

Motivating Students:

- Ensure that we communicate (explicitly) the potential benefits of PDP
- Lead by example! – if staff value PDP, so will students
- Recognize their efforts (accreditation?)
- Emphasize link with employability
- Employers value graduates who are reflective, and capable of managing their own learning, personal & professional development.

ACTIVITIES

Learning styles questionnaires:

This questionnaire is designed to find out your preferred learning style(s). Over the years you have probably developed learning „habits“ that help you benefit more from some experiences than from others. There is no time limit to this questionnaire. The accuracy of the results depends on how honest you can be. There are no right or wrong answers. If you agree more than you disagree with the statement, put a tick against the appropriate number on the score sheet. If you disagree more than you agree, put a cross against the appropriate number on the score sheet. Be sure to mark each item with either a tick or cross. PDP skills set insight, perception, Self-evaluation, and awareness and lead to autonomy and high levels of self-efficacy.

LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE

A study on 1979 Harvard MBA students asked them: “Have you set clear, written goals for your future and made plans to accomplish them?” Only 3% of the graduates had written goals and plans; 13% had non-written goals and 84% had no specific goals at all.

TEN YEARS LATER they were interviewed again.

1. The 13% of the class who had goals were earning, on average, twice as much as the 84% who had no goals.

2. The 3% who had clear, written goals were earning, on average, ten times as much as the other 97% put together.

You could say they were so focused that would have happened anyway but it’s impossible to separate the behavior from the output. One assumption of PDPs is that we can all „learn“ to be focused.

LEARNING-STYLE PREFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

How well do you learn from these methods?

Whole Class Activities	Very well	Well	Okay	Not Well	Badly	Notes
Lecture/Teacher talk						
Question & Answer						
Demonstration						
Watching a video/film						
Notice board style displays						
Overhead projector						
White/blackboard						
Teacher led whole class discussion						
Free flowing whole class discussion						
Visits						
Dictation						
Individual Activities	Very well	Well	Okay	Not Well	Badly	
Essay writing/formal reasoning						
Exam paper questions						
Worksheets or other individual work						
Self produced handouts						
Commercially produced handouts						
Homework/private study						
Individual assignments						
Student personal choice in an assignment						
Individually negotiated activities						



