



Increasing Emphasis on Soft Skills: Need of the Hour in Modern Management Practices

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Abstract

Traditionally, the value of project managers depended on their certifications and their skills in implementing different methodologies. However, more and more organizations are now shifting their focus to soft skills. This project management trend is understandable as AI-powered solutions have become capable enough to handle the trickier technical parts of project management. Managers are free to focus on other responsibilities and that is where soft skills become necessary. Project managers now need to focus and strengthen their soft skills such as conflict resolution, stakeholder engagement, negotiation, mentoring and training, decision-making, and team building. Developing these skills will help project managers deliver more value to their organization. The top management expects their teams to communicate effectively, collaborate effectually, and work productively. Mere technical qualifications may not help in achieving this. According to Lisa Howell, founder and CEO of future think, an internationally recognized innovation research and training company in the United States “soft skills such as listening, creativity, agility and problem-solving, are becoming as important as expertise and technical competency. The young employees expect immediate results from such a program, experts believe that habits can take some time to change. After all, soft skills are habits as well as managerial skills.

Key Words: Attitude, Hard Skills, Modern Management, Soft Skills

Introduction

Knowledge itself is not enough, we need to communicate it to others effectively. In fact effective communication is one of the keys to success. By successfully getting our message across, we convey our thoughts and ideas effectively. The message is the information that we want to communicate. It is essential to be technically sound,

but we should also have the ability to express and communicate our ideas clearly and effectively to others in the simplest possible manner. Effective communication and soft skills not only improve our relationships with others, but they also improve our efficiency.

Everyone has some type of soft skill. These skills are built over some time and get developed via a mode of experience and previous positions held by an individual. They are transferable skills and cannot be taken away. Soft skills allow a person to work for any industry or organization and do not limit people to perform specific work or to function in specific work environments. Soft skills allow an individual to demonstrate what soft skills he carries in his personality, attributes, and attitude.

Soft or social skills (also called non-technical skills) are those personal values and interpersonal skills that determine a person's ability to work well with others in a project team. Soft skills are needed to deal with the external world and to work in a collaborative manner with one's colleagues. These skills include effective communication, leadership, and teamwork skills; demonstrating problem solving abilities, initiative, and motivation skills; displaying honesty and strong work ethics. Soft skills play a vital role for academic and professional success; they help us excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in the emerging information or knowledge society. Soft skills are needed to deal with the external world and to work in a collaborative manner with one's colleagues.

Developing soft skills needs practice. These are acquired and experienced on the spot. Soft skills cannot be acquired by merely reading textbooks. The soft skills we gain equip us to excel in our academic/professional life and in our personal life. It is a continuous learning process. Development of soft skills has two parts. One part involves developing attitudes and attributes, and the other part involves fine-tuning communication skills to express attitudes, ideas, and thoughts. Perfect integration of ideas and attitudes with appropriate communication skills in oral, written, and non-verbal areas is necessary for successful work. Attitudes and skills are integral to soft skills. Each one influences and complements the other.

Need of Soft Skills

Most interactions with other people require some level of soft skills. At a company you might be negotiating to win a new contract, presenting your new idea to colleagues, networking for a new job, and so on. We use soft skills everyday at work and developing these soft skills will help you win more business and accelerate your career progression. On the other hand, a lack of soft skills can limit your potential, or even be the downfall of your business. By developing strong leadership, delegation, teamwork, and communication abilities, you can run projects more smoothly, deliver results that please everyone, and even positively influence your personal life by improving how you interact with others. Outside of the office, soft skills such as communication are used to build friendship groups and meet potential partners. You might be negotiating the price of your new house renovation,

or mentoring your neighbors' children on the weekend. Soft skills are useful both in our professional and personal lives.

Skills such as active listening, collaboration, presenting ideas and communicating with colleagues are all highly valued in the modern workplace. Strong soft skills ensure a productive, collaborative and healthy work environment, all crucial attributes for organisations in an increasingly competitive world.

Most Important Soft Skills

- Communication skills
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Making Decisions
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self Motivation and Work Ethic
- Leadership Skills
- Teamworking Skills
- Creativity and Problem Solving
- Time Management and the ability to work under pressure

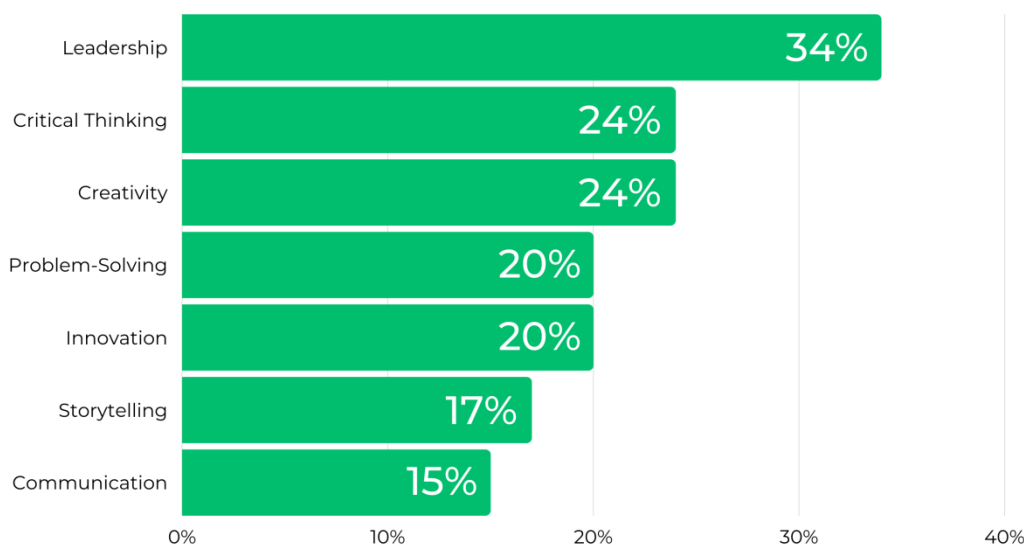
Soft Skills vs. Hard Skills

While the term “hard skills” generally refers to specific and technical knowledge sets (such as programming languages or data analytics), soft skills in the workplace are by nature more cross-functional. Rather than mapping to a particular task, soft skills are the traits that allow employees to be effective both as individual contributors and as colleagues.

Soft skills include social-emotional capabilities and traits like adaptability and resilience. While they are often seen as innate personality traits, most people can build up their soft skills through study and practice, just like they might build a set of hard skills.

In the Emeritus 2021 Global Career Impact Survey, we found the following soft skills in the workplace had the highest demand among professionals looking to upskill their teams or organizations: management/leadership (34%), critical thinking (24%), design thinking/creativity (24%), problem-solving (20%), innovation (20%), storytelling (17%), communication (15%).

Top Soft Skills Needed in Teams and Organizations



Source: Emeritus 2021 Global Career Impact Survey

Similarly, the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2020 report found that the No. 1 skill employees will need by 2025 is analytical thinking and innovation.

How to Build Soft Skills in the Workplace

Since soft skills tend to be nuanced and often rely on interpreting complex social signals, many organizations and managers worry they can't be taught through employee training. Yet, while they may not be as simple to convey as technical skills—and improvements may not be as easy to measure—it's more than possible to help employees advance in these areas.

Companies should consider the following strategies when upskilling employees and building soft skills in the workplace.

Identify Areas for Improvement

While soft skills can seem hard to pin down, existing data can often provide a solid starting point for companies looking to improve in this area.

For example, customer satisfaction data is invaluable for identifying gaps in employees' communications and customer relations skills. If customers report unhelpful or unempathetic service, it's more than likely that the customer service team could use training to develop soft skills such as communication and handling difficult conversations.

Similarly, if a team frequently misses deadlines or fails to consider essential information, they may need additional support in building time management and organizational processes.

Encourage Individual Feedback and Mentorship

At the level of individual employees, performance reviews and 360-degree reviews where feedback is provided by an employee's peers and reports are invaluable sources of data on areas of strength and weakness. Managers can review the data they collect to identify patterns and develop specific plans focusing on how to improve soft skills.

Individual managers are often best placed to provide nuanced assessments of employees' soft skills and in-the-moment feedback.

Since concepts like the appropriate tone to take in a professional email or the ideal way to deescalate a tricky interaction can be hard to convey in the abstract, managers are uniquely positioned to respond to an evolving situation and either coach employees on how to handle it or share the positives and negatives of their approach.

Lead by Example

Managers and mentors also have the opportunity to teach by example. Lower-level employees will naturally tend to take their managers' behavior and actions into account when forming their own ideas about professional norms. This makes it especially important that organizational leaders are strong models of soft skills.

Weigh Internal Development Opportunities

While individual feedback is invaluable, employees at all levels can also benefit from receiving formalized, scaffolded training to help them develop and maximize their soft skills.

Internally, companies might consider team, division, or organization-wide trainings or programs that formalize murkier topics like adapting to change or teamwork. Soft skills with more concrete applications, like organization or time management, are particularly well-suited to this type of approach. Some companies are even using emerging technology like virtual reality to provide this type of training.

Put Soft Skills in the Workplace into Practice

Other soft skills, like project management or creativity, can be developed through a combination of training programs and hands-on assignments or exercises. For example, an employee might be asked to bring their own campaign ideas to a planning meeting at which they receive feedback, or even be given an opportunity to lead a

project that would normally be handled by their manager. Non-critical projects in particular are often rich with opportunities for developing employees.

Consider External Soft Skills Training

When internal training isn't enough, many organizations send employees through external courses or programs to develop essential soft skills. This approach can pay dividends when it comes to skills like strategic thinking or innovation. Often, an outside perspective is what's needed to freshen up an organization's approach. Options for external training might include small private online courses like those Emeritus offers, either for individual or group enrollment.

Emeritus courses designed to build soft skills cover topics ranging from design thinking and creativity to leading organizations, with dozens of offerings in between. Since academic and professional leaders design and teach these courses, which include participants from a wide range of industries, they offer professionals the tools they need to see problems from new and innovative angles.

Conclusion

The world is changing fast with the onset of artificial intelligence in almost every field of work, machines are replacing and automating tasks that humans once performed. However, there is no substitute for soft skills. Hence, these become a differentiator for a job seeker to fit himself in the fast-changing job market landscape and meet the hiring requirements of any organization. So, human-centric skills are becoming essential due to this change. Hiring employees with advanced soft skills can significantly impact their working capability from an organization's perspective. To summarize, the below factors strongly emphasize the importance of soft skills from the individual as well as business point of view: soft skills can be polished by practice. Make it a routine to work on soft skills that require improvement and work on them consistently. Some professionals have specific soft skills as their strength. It is a good practice to observe these skills in them and make it a habit to incorporate them into your day-to-day use. A mentor who can give constructive feedback and model appropriate skills can go a long way in helping you hone your skills.

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