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WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SOFT SKILLS?

Again, the answer regarding the importance of soft skills depends a lot on context and personal perception. However, there is one property that immediately comes to mind for most people when soft skills are mentioned: communication skills. Indeed, it is the talent of communication skills that college and university graduates lack the most. Asking people what exactly they mean by communication skills, you can get a wide range of answers, because communication skills include many different aspects. It can be about language proficiency (local or foreign), behaviour (self-esteem, etiquette, and culture), conversation (dialog, discussion, rhetoric etc.), presentation (body language, media, organization) [1]. In the English speaking world “Language proficiency is the ability to speak, read, and write Standard English in a business-like way. One may have the ‘hard’ skill of knowing what usage is correct and what is incorrect, but lack the ‘soft’ skills of knowing when to use only standard forms and in what tone to use them” [1]. In this definition our basic soft skill “Communication Skills” itself is divided into a “soft” and a “hard” part. Furthermore, adequate communication skills are a prerequisite for a range of other soft skills like moderating discussions or conflict management.

Also, there are soft skills that are often lacking in higher education is critical and structured thinking. Both go hand in hand with problem solving abilities. In today's information society, it is especially important to critically filter the endless stream of incoming data, analyze it and make informed decisions based on it. Analytical skills are also the foundation for developing solutions to any problem. Again, soft skills are equally useful in a person's professional and personal life. The last soft skill to highlight here is creativity. This skill is often misinterpreted as being useful only for artists, whereas in science or business, only structured logical thinking should be applied. However, this opinion is wrong. Applying creativity leads to “thinking outside the box,” which means that these generally accepted rules and constraints are not considered in order to find innovative approaches to problem

solving. If Albert Einstein had not bypassed the principles of Newton's old established physics and had not even thrown away a little common sense, he probably would not have arrived at his revolutionary new view of physics. Brainstorming and mind mapping are well-known applications of creativity in the business world.

How can soft skills be acquired? Hopefully, in most educational institutions at all levels, the teaching methodology has been or will be changed towards student centred learning. This shift goes hand in hand with introducing soft skills into hard skills teaching. In other words: students participating in a lecture with the aim of mastering complex skills will inevitably and unconsciously practice a range of soft skills. This is very close to the ideal way of giving lectures [1].

The first step in improving students' interpersonal skills is to raise their awareness of the importance of interpersonal skills and the consequences of deficiencies in this regard. Students should be encouraged to improve their interpersonal skills by applying the techniques previously mentioned, such as reading special books, attending courses, and joining clubs or societies to broaden their horizons, such as discussion societies, toast masters practicing rhetoric, or scientific societies that offer presentations, and discussions. A formal approach to the problem would be to include interpersonal subjects in the curriculum of the program. At lower levels, a course that requires students to do a little research and then present their results to the class has been quite effective. At the graduate level, the course on management skills, including, for example, some communication skills, together with the management of time, conflict, cultural issues and, most importantly, themselves, were well received by the students in practice. However, very often curricula are already overloaded with continuing education courses, which make it almost impossible to add or replace courses. In addition, other educators may ignore the importance of soft skills and therefore not support specific courses in this regard. A very elegant way of teaching interpersonal skills to students is to incorporate it into the hard skills teaching. Thus, no changes to the curriculum of the program are required; instead, the change will be reflected in the teaching methodology of teachers. Increased group discussions, giving students the opportunity to make

presentations and using special techniques throughout the course are good ways for developing soft skills.

There are additional a few recommendations how to effectively develop soft skills in students [2]. The development of students' interpersonal skills should be the task of every educational institution. The performance of educational institutions should be judged not only by the specific disciplines and competencies of their students, but also by the level of preparation of students in terms of effective communication, interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and ability to adapt to change, ability to solve problems, self-awareness and management, and etc. To make soft skills development programs relevant, industry needs to be involved in defining a skill set, developing a coherent curriculum, delivering the curriculum through different learning experiences, assessing, evaluating and certifying competencies for greater market acceptance. Course curricula should incorporate and combine cognitive knowledge with soft skills to ensure proper communication between theory and practice to develop soft skills in students. It is even necessary to develop some course modules that can meet these goals. Academic institutions should establish well-developed systems to inform students about how soft skills will be taught and evaluated. Courses should be structured, activities designed, and requirements laid out to encourage students to embrace interdependence and think critically, systematically, and strategically in preparation for becoming valuable members of the organization.

In conclusion, the importance of soft skills in fast-developing modern world is increasing over time [2].

Reference:

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2. Wats M., Wats R. K. Developing Soft Skills in Students // The International Journal of Learning Annual Review. - 2009. - Volume 15.