A Study on the Soft Skill Requirements and Suggested Training for Student Community at Nursing Colleges, in Today's Context

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Abstract: A study to understand the training need for better employability and explore the probable ways to influence nursing student community to enhance their employability in one of the cities of India, Chennai, which serves as city which houses many corporate hospitals in India. Our country has the unique stature in world, having a staggering percentage of youth population, includes those aspirants wish to pursue higher education in paramedical sciences from institutions, this situation laments in Chennai too, the Capital city of Tamilnadu. This city is established as a place to pursue nursing education, as there is a strong employability scope in and around Chennai and neighbouring cities. When students join these colleges a, sizable majority of them are expected to join as students, expecting to be in the corporate hospitals, as "Staff nurse", which is quite predictable. We attempted to understand the need for training the students in the Soft skills, and emphasize the necessity of incorporating soft skills training programs in colleges, highlighting the objectives of soft skills techniques teaching methods to be applied, if given such a importance, what would be the ideal methodology and tools and aids for such practices.

Keywords: Soft skills, personality development, skill gap, employability training, nursing education

THE BACKGROUND

It is observed that today employers prefer to hire and retain, promote those who are resourceful, ethical and self directed with good 'soft skills', even though hard skills and experience are the pre-requisites for gaining access or entry and improving their scalability in the organization, nonetheless, colleges are reluctant to include soft skills training in the program of study. There are some exceptions to this, as some private universities have choice based credit papers or/and marks assigned to this skill in their academic curriculum. The complicated role of the nursing care professionals creates challenges when ensuring a team to meet its

goals. Learning to successfully navigate the cross-functional team is important for any health care professional (Lazarus, 2013). Nurses and other professionals must learn the skills to influence change through interpersonal performance (Bedwell, Fiore, & Salas, 2014). Soft skills are the tools that help nurses navigate the difficulties of teams.

What are the soft skill requirements for an employee in the eyes of nursing professionals or hospital administration?

Key components of soft skills include: building trust, understanding and managing work expectations, adaptation of communication style to meet the demands of the situation, providing effective coaching and feedback, coping with stress, dealing with conflicts, delegating effectively, and addressing employee habits effectively (Ashbaugh, 2003).

Often soft skills can equate to one's ability to get along with others through improved teamwork, communication, and ethical behaviours (James & James, 2004).

Many studies suggest that shortages of soft skills of employees, including communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, high order thinking, as they found only a portion of students from colleges are directly employable and the situation has not changed grossly in the last five years in India, suggesting employers regard shortages in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and high order thinking, responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills.

This means that there's a real gap between the soft skills the organization needs, and the skills employees have. Irrespective of the professional qualification and apart from the domain knowledge, today's professionals and future leaders need to possess a high Soft Skills quotient in order to succeed in this competitive era. Murray (2011) proposed that key causes of hospital nursing staff turnovers are ingrained in a lack of soft skill behaviours such as: leadership, communication, and organizational structure.

The final soft skill to be considered amongst staff nurses was critical thinking, multiple disciplines define critical thinking as a key soft skill (Beard, 2008; Britton).

Considering the above, the study is made an attempt to measure the association between training needs and soft skills such communication skills development, interpersonal skill training and intention to work in a nursing care or health care institution.

How to study this requirement in a nursing college?

To study this totally 536 of staff nurses of Chennai city were randomly selected, who were with nursing homes and hospitals, a well structured questionnaire was developed, to collect data from the identified respondents, keeping in view the soft skill requirements of them, the questionnaire included two parts, like demographic profile of the respondents and questions related to perception towards the such soft skills training programs and their satisfaction levels to pursue their education, as prepared students for improved employability quotient. Cronbach's alpha values were most fell within the range of 0.75 to 0.89. Used multiple regression analysis to identify the impact on perception on training on soft skills, IBM SPSS 22 version was used for statistical purpose.

The following precincts, which had influence on their education in institutions, in the form of sets of carefully arranged simple questions, were asked to respondents, through the questionnaire, from

a) What are relations between soft skills training and development, like communication skills, listening skill, team management skills, behavioural skills and employee commitment, job satisfaction?

b) Can the variables of such soft skill training have binding on satisfaction and intention to pursue their education as confident graduates?

c) How nurses' individuality and personality affect factor such as perception of training, employee dedication, job accomplishment and stay or intent to leave in the long run?

The following soft skills were identified as to be imbibed, by nursing staff, based on the responses from the questionnaire

i) Comprehensible communication is a distinct requisite, when dealing with clients who might not have the same degree of understanding, it's very important to speak and write clearly, larger health care institutions also persist upon English communication skills as it is not each ones first language, in the arouse of globalization so speaking clearly becomes even more important more so, if required, dealing with foreigners.

ii) Listening - is the most important soft skill of them all, but it's also the most difficult skill to learn. It's easy to think one is listening, during work, giving nursing care but hearing someone speak doesn't mean ones understands the message behind what they are saying (Lindner, on listening skills).

iii) Enthusiasm & positive attitude-On the whole, being enthusiastic and positive, helps them to increase their efforts in offering patient care and job satisfaction.

iv) Team building –This skill had been one of the factors for learning the technical and clinical skills better, rated as an effective one to stay with the nursing homes, in spite of stressed situations, and inadequate compensation benefits .

EXPERIMENT

Having identified these, the next question to address was to see how those soft skills training, have an effect on students of nursing education, in a nursing college, which preferably has a medical college hospital attached to it, to be trained, by engaging skill development trainers and how it would pave ways to source to train nursing students in colleges on those soft skills, later, if taken across to larger groups? To study this, one of the batches of nursing students, about 50, belonging to the final years, from a medical college hospital were involved, in the study.

There were some imminent questions were to be addressed by those behavioural skill development trainers to think about, beforehand, from the questionnaire in the process analysis, which are given below for the soft skill.

Was the knowledge /skill deficiency of the participants identified?

Were needs translated into training objectives?

Was the evaluation system designed to measure accomplished of objectives?

Was trainee motivation to learn assessed?

What opportunities are included in the training to provide behavioural habits or practice?

There was also strong need to address these prospective questions during training, which may lead to the participant's skill development and learning satisfaction, leading to job satisfaction, later, for the participants, who are future prospective candidates of a health care system:

Were the trainer and the training techniques and leaning objectives well matched?

Were portions of the training effective?

Was the involvement of nursing students encouraged or solicited?

Did the trainer conduct appropriately the various methodologies (case, role-play, etc?)

Were they explained well?

Was enough time given for each of the requirements?

Was time allowed for questions for the participants?

Considering the above said, a suggested training methodology was developed, using technology for the training students, which would enable them to inculcate the following:

Facilitate nurses to communicate effectively and professionally with patients with empathy,

Appreciate the critical nature of the role of nurses and the requisite attention to detail, through active listening,

Appreciate etiquette requirements in providing nursing care,

Become skilled at tools and techniques to deal with stress and remain positive,

Discuss difficult situations that arise in the role and common causes of stress for them with their superiors,

Recognize the importance of effective communication for a nurse,

Discuss general barriers in communication in colleges and ways to overcome these,

Identify challenges in dealing with various types of patients and their attendees,

Develop compassionate and service orientated attitude among nursing staff.

Training methodology developed included role plays, modelling, question based discussions, customized case studies, simulations & group activities. Effectively put to use training classrooms with smart interactive boards; as it gives the platform to display training contents in the forms of MS, with power point presentations, images and documents, the usage of ICT (information and communication technologies) aptly for taking videos of mock drills, mock recruiter interview sessions and displaying for leaning from the behaviour of the candidate during the course of the interviews, this will, for sure, encourage modelling, which is believed as an effective ,means of learning soft skills.(Federman, distinguished emeritus professor, University at Buffalo).

By Accessing 'content sites' or those websites which give the learner the required knowledge for learning and developing in the form of e-learning platform like the 'BBC Leaning English', the 'ESL', 'English for everyone', 'learn English have fun' sites also for updating and getting the latest blogs and discussions.

RESULT

The results are of the twelve hour short training session which was conducted on those final year nursing students, could throw light, to study the impact and scope of soft skill training for their overall on job satisfaction on their appointment as staff nurse in future, or days to come.

In this analysis, the dependent variable was Job satisfaction; Independent variables were perceived availability of training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived benefits of training and motivation to learn.

Details of study

Dependent Variable – Job Satisfaction (y)

Independent Variables

Perceived Availability of Soft skill Training (X1)

Perceived Supervisor Support for Soft skill Training (X2)

Perceived Benefits of Soft skill Training (X3)

Motivation to learn soft skills (X4)

Table 1
Impact of dimensions of opinion about training on soft skills

Variables	*B*	*S.E*	*Beta*	*t-value*	*p-value*
Constant	2.123	0.166	——-	12.818	0.000**
Perceived Availability of Soft skill Training	0.287	0.040	0.374	7.216	0.000**
Perceived Supervisor Support for Soft skills Training	-0.084	0.033	-0.093	-2.562	0.011*
Perceived Benefits of Training	0.132	0.037	0.180	3.596	0.000**
Motivation to Learn soft skills	0.083	0.029	0.112	2.903	0.004**

** Denotes significant at 1% level
* Denotes significant at 5% level
Multiple R value: 0.554
R Square value: 0.307
Adjusted R square value: 0.302
F value: 58.924
P value: 0.000

The multiple correlation coefficient is 0.554 measures the degree of association between the authentic values and the predicted values of the job satisfaction. Because the predicted values are obtained as a linear combination of perceived availability of soft skill training (X1), perceived supervisor support for the soft skill training (X2), perceived benefits of such training (X3) and motivation to learn soft skills (X4), the coefficient value of 0.554 indicates that the relationship between job satisfaction and the four independent variables is quite strong and optimistic.

The coefficient of determination R-square measures the goodness-of-fit of the estimated sample regression plane (SRP) in terms of the proportion of the variation in the dependent variables, explained by

the fitted sample regression equation. Thus, the value of R square is 0.307 simply means that about 30.7% of the variation in job satisfaction is explained and R square value is significant at 1 % level.

For this purpose the following multiple regression equation was used
$$Y= 2.123+0.287 X1- 0.084 X2 + 0.132 X3 + 0.083 X4 \quad (1)$$

The coefficient of X1 is 0.287 represents the partial effect of perceived availability of training on job satisfaction, holding the other variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that job satisfaction would increase by 0.287 for every unit increase in perceived availability of training and this coefficient value is significant at 1% level. The coefficient of X2 is -0.084 represents the partial effect of perceived supervisor support for training on job satisfaction, holding the other variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that job satisfaction would increase by -0.084 for every unit increase in perceived supervisor support for such training and this coefficient value is significant at 5% level. The coefficient of X3 is 0.132 represents the partial effect of perceived benefits of training on job satisfaction, holding the other variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that job satisfaction would increase by 0.132 for every unit increase in perceived benefits of training and this coefficient value is significant at 1% level. The coefficient of X4 is 0.083 represents the partial effect of motivation to learn on job satisfaction, holding the other variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that job satisfaction would increase by 0.083 for every unit increase in motivation to learn and this coefficient value is significant at 1% level. Based on standardized coefficient, perceived availability of training (0.374), perceived benefits of training (0.180) are found as the most important factors to attain job satisfaction, followed by motivation to learn (0.112) and perceived supervisor support for training (-0.093).

The above post training analysis of the short soft skill training schedule had given us insights on the factors like availability of such soft skill trainings use of the acquired skills leading to better performance, swiftly acting in critical circumstances, reported as one of the perceived benefits post training, with more expertise when caring for their patients, coupled with supervisor support for such soft skills training initiatives, was recognized more important to many nurses. It also revealed that job satisfaction is different for each one, the perception is positive, when such training initiatives are included while the students pursue their education. It also suggests that the leadership support is positively related to job satisfaction among staff nurses, which has been identified important finding, as it supports the view what kind of an influential role the nursing manager and can play, which the nursing students pursuing nursing education would become in the future. Consequently, it was observed that motivation to learn improved and enhanced preparation for their profession, moreover, reduced the withdrawal or turnover intention among nurses and it will have a positive impact in building up their career.

SUGGESTIONS & CONCLUSION

(A) How can this be implemented in curriculum in colleges? It is suggested from the findings to bring about some additions in the current education system, consider including soft skills in the syllabus plan for training, about 24 to 36 hours spread over two months, in general, which may be customized, based on the need, for better understanding and sustained learning, which may include modules for all the years from first year to final year, under graduate programs. Basically all the content to be developed to cater the need of the reader to use the same when it is needed. The training module for

the final years suggested, may include mock sessions of interviews and group discussions, (GD) where the participants are interviewed, in simulated conditions and their interviews are recorded and when displayed the participant take tips to improve, including that of body language, tone and gestures. For making the GDs interesting current topics videos are displayed and students are suggested to find the gaps in them, then their own attempts are captured, played for further learning, here it was found that the usage of adequate and apt ICT (information and communication technologies) like that of the smart board, projectors, good audio visual assisted class rooms, would facilitate the learning process.

(B)   What are ways suggested to strengthen the training? Apart from this, final years nursing students may be gaining additional knowledge , if effectively trained in class rooms by demonstrating in classrooms, with the help of smart boards about the nursing home , hospitals and large institutions, by visiting their portals ,like the Apollo hospital ,medical college hospitals like that of the CMC hospital, Fortis hospitals for the students, for instance , to make a better understanding about those the corporate firms, their vision and objectives there are opportunities for them to get a good idea to prepare for interviews, further, based on the learning they make after this, the students may be asked to make presentation in classrooms their understanding about such institutions, by the students of and by the students of nursing and paramedical sciences hospitals and nursing homes as seminar topics, using interactive board, to have rounded benefits.

C.   Further training can be offered for final years with the support of electronic media, in getting information about the other for preparing them to even take proficiency tests like the IELTS / TOEFL; (*www.ielts.org*) playing BBC documentaries and connecting to portals of language enhancement websites such as http://www.teachitelt.com/, where there are lots of content for training in verbal skills, learning grammar and building speaking competencies. These sites have mock drill sessions incorporated for the learners to assess their progress and report to the trainer for further enhancements.

D.   When it comes to the pre-final, the suggested training period is between 24 hours to 36 hours, depending upon the time available to handle various modules from language enhancement to soft skills as well the ones like the civil services examinations conducted in India, encouragement can be given to the students to watch videos in different blogs and for instance http://www.havefunteaching.com/worksheets/english-worksheet kind web based e-learning sites and come with presentation using the smart board about the process which the companies generally adopt for recruitment and training them in industries. This in one such way that helps them gain knowledge about the institutions and nursing homes and other prospective employers and employment opportunities and also encourages them to debate, discuss about the merits of career with these employers, interacting with freedom within their peer group. This sets the tone for their GD preparation while in pre-final.

E.   The second year module includes language skill development in the four pillars of LSRW,(listening speaking, reading, writing) the training content may be carefully developed using information technology such as compact discs with the tape scripts of IELTS materials, and book publishers such as the Barons and Cambridge compact discs for developing their listening skills.

F.   To bring about the interactive learning skills the students are to be engaged in classes with use of smart board, using this the students are connected for viewing the videos of multiple intelligence and multitasking functions. the different tasks are displayed and footages of various documentaries are

shown for generating ideas about multitasking and its advantages in real time application in industry scenario, for instance https://www.englishclub.com/learn-english/learn-english-how.htm is one among the sites that are also displayed to further substantiate their skill sets in these areas of soft skills.

For the first years it is suggested to have a structured plan to involve the students utilize and learn using information technology such as presentation of mind maps with smart interactive boards. The students here are encouraged to develop a mind map, based on the training inputs and then the topic given to them on a chart paper and then they are photographed and displayed on the smart board, interact with class mates, eventually encouraging them to address their class with a mind maps which they had created as a group, developing their team skills as well. This mind map tool had been contributed by Tony buzan for integrating ideas and connecting them with words, pictures and colours.

CONCLUSION

It is expected that there would be a definite change in the mind sets of the students of nursing colleges belonging to the current generation, when we engage technology in education ICT, with empathy and training knowledge in soft skills, there is a definite scope for better involvement reported by them in their academy, with plenty of skill development ,as a result .Encouraged by these kinds of training, it is expected that the institutions would not hesitate to expand this to larger community of students, as imparting such training activities would possibly compel or intimidate them include a soft skill training calendar in their system. These findings have also suggested ways of integrating technology in employability training and soft skills development would probably bring about the positive change in employability equation, by influencing student community pursuing professional courses develop their competencies to meet the requirements of their employability.

Scope for further research

The findings of this study should be considered in view of the following limitations:

The study was done in the private hospitals nursing students of only a single metro city, though the population comprises of almost all the linguistic and ethnic group who learn nursing, the study can be conducted across major metros.

The study instruments were questionnaires which had a certain degree of validity and reliability, However, the results of more surveys would have cased variations in the result, may be like personal emotion, pretending and assuming, personal emotion and other attitudes.

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