

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXTS: FACING GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN SUSTAINING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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India, being one of the leading economic centers to attract global commerce has been witnessing insurgency to build quality professionals. To captivate large-scale and long-term global market, it needs to prove relevant capabilities to execute business projects and outsourcing services. This article highlights about the impact of global commerce and business communication on technocrats in the making of India as an industrialized country. The emergence of Multinational Corporation (MNC) companies, Software companies and the advent of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies have led the nation in evoking the spirits of professionalism in young technocrats. Though tremendous opportunities are found, engineering students are facing unemployment due to lack of employability skills. As the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from academics to the workplace has been the much emphasized professional criteria demanded by all the employers, the students need to renovate themselves in developing the skills of employability. This article commends that significant human resource development needs to be realized through synergizing employability skills through vocational needs based curriculum.

Key words: business communication, employability skills, global commerce, human resources development, software companies, outsourcing services

Introduction

The affect and effect of globalization on commerce and business communication are distinctively acknowledged since the last decade of the twentieth century. As India is facing heavy competitions with other countries like China and South Korea, Indian manpower should be potentially charged with target level competence as required by the global markets. As Multinational Corporation companies demand technical caliber and outsourcing services, the engineering professionals need to satisfy them with their knowledge and still expertise. To meet the industrial needs and global challenges, it needs to shape and construct the technical degree holders into capable professionals. As job opportunities are significantly apparent, the human resources need to be qualified on par with the standards of expectation (Rhode & French, 1994). This article reflects about the role of emerging professionals in cultivating necessary skills to meet the requirements of job.

Impact of Global Commerce and Business Communication

The last decade of the twentieth century has witnessed India becoming an IT hub and the first decade of the twenty first century recognizes it as one of the leading

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software exports. The economic hike promulgates the speed of IT and ITES exports. In the midst of economic regression, India stood as a vibrant software service provider in both national and international markets. The strategic reviews of NASSCOM (The National Association of Software Services Companies) reflect the rise of nation's economic growth in tandem with the raise of software and outsourcing services. One of the leading job portals, info.shine.com reflects on the stability of Indian software industry,

Over the years, while successfully sustaining global competition, the industry within itself has matured in a big way. As a result, **India has emerged as one of the fastest growing IT hubs in the world; its growth being dominated by IT software and services such as Custom Application Development and Maintenance (CADM), System Integration, IT Consulting, Application Management, Infrastructure Management Services, Software testing, service-oriented architecture and Web services.** In the process, it has opened up numerous avenues at different levels for technical as well as non-technical job aspirants.

(<http://info.shine.com/Industryspecific/IT/6.aspx>)

While discussing on the job opportunities prevailed in IT sectors, info.shine.com reflects on the existing career openings in the various departments of programming, applications, networking and servicing.

There is a tremendous demand for trained personnel in IT sector. According to a NASSCOM report, National Association of Software and Services Companies, 'Strategic Review 2007' direct employment is expected to exceed \$1.6 million.

Essentially, jobs in the Information Technology sector lie within one of four main career paths. **The broad Computer Science Application group includes systems analysts, computer programmers, computer scientists, software engineers, and database/network administrators.** The remaining positions fall within either the *Management/Supervisory group* (e.g., project or technical managers), in *Customer Service and Support* (computer support specialists), or in *Sales/Relationship Management* (sales engineers)/ While the visible faces of the IT sector are the 'techies' or programmers, the sales force also plays a very important part.

(Source: <http://info.shine.com/Industryspecific/IT/6.aspx>)

Most of the companies realize that the prevailing job opportunities are tremendously increasing but the emerging professionals suffer with a dearth of talent in them. timesjobs.com reports about the lack of human resources prevailing in India. Though the graduate population emerging from the technical colleges is comparatively increasing, they are unable to get placed due to their lack of adequate skills and expertise. timesjobs.com cites the views of Mohan Das Pai, Director, Infosys Technologies.

The rapid growth in the software services and BPO industry in the country is expected to lead to a shortage of manpower in the coming years.

The government needs to do something urgently to resolve the existing education infrastructure in the country.

Currently only 50% of the engineering graduates in the country are 'employable' and even if the top software services companies in the country continue to grow at the current pace they will absorb all of this.

(<http://www.timesjobs.com.Mailers/HRDialogue/May06/19.01.06/landingpage.htm>)

timesjobs.com acclaims the views of HR Personnel that the country is able to produce more degree holders but without relevant talent to meet the industrial needs.

As India Inc rides on a wave of growth, human resource managers realise to their horror that skills shortage may turn out to be the biggest spanner in their global ambition.

(<http://www.timesjobs.com.Mailers/HRDialogue/January/18.01.06/landingpage.htm>)

Though the dearth of talent is there, pool of capabilities and skill competencies are also there to attract the leading MNC companies to invest in this soil. shine.com reports about the tremendous job opportunities found ahead in India.

The Indian IT sector is expected to grow in a big way in the near future. Today, it already finds itself in a position where Indian IT companies have already established their superiority in terms of cost advantage, availability of skilled manpower and the quality of services across the world. Moreover, they have been continuously enhancing their global service delivery capabilities through a combination of organic and inorganic growth initiatives.

Global giants such as Microsoft, SAP, Oracle, and Lenovo have already established their captive centres in India. These companies recognise the advantage India offers, as compared to other competing countries such as China or South Korea, and also the fact that it is among the fastest growing IT markets in the Asia-Pacific region.

(<http://info.shine.com/Industryspecific/IT/6.aspx>)

Recruitment Ideologies and Talent Acquisition

The pertinent use of formal and informal oral communication can be found in the departmental meetings and company collaborations in both onshore and offshore. On the grounds of business transactions to be made in the working place, internal and external communication is extended. Productive skills and interpersonal skills need to be developed to foster business relationships (Ahiauzu, 1984). Most of the employers reveal that the basic problem they found with the employees is communication. They often reflect that they often encounter language problems in them. They reflect that they are not able to express in speaking and writing and are always engrossed with language and cognitive problems. So, it is pertinent to understand what the HR Personnel actually means by language and communication skills. Mr. R. Sakthivel, HR Manager, Vibromech Engg. & Ser. Ltd., reflects,

Language and communication skills are very important. Good grammar and good sentence making is very important in communication. Basic language and communication skills should be improved. They need to communicate their message. Understanding the message is important.

Mr. Parthasarathy and Ms. Manju, HR Manager, Airtel reveal,

From the very beginning of our company we understand that English communication skills are very important for business communication.

The HR Personnel emphasize on the importance of both basic and technical communication skills. They reflect on the urgency of developing discursive skills. They stress that good presentation skills and business correspondences are specifically needed for developing speaking and writing skills. Most of the HR Personnel expect that the emerging professionals need to describe about their product and should be able to provide details of their service. timesjob.com (citing The Economic Times) reports about the recruitment ideologies and trends about the various MNC companies. In the hire blog page of its official website, it offers information about the HR visions of the company. The interviews with the HR Personnel are found to be quite useful in understanding the demands of the employers and the company's requirement on talent acquisition. As the fresh employees are not found to be suitable with the company's expectations, they organize several training programs to develop their aptitude abilities, communication and technical skills. Mr. Dinesh Jain, *VP (HR)*, *Flex Industries Limited* shares about the provision of training given to the employees.

For new employees, our company has a two-month induction program. Further training imparted to fresh recruits is need based, and on-the-job training is provided to recruits who are inducted in specialised areas. Technical and soft skills training is also imparted from time to time to our employees. The training modules thus conducted are either in-house or carried out by specialised agencies.

(http://www.timesjobs.com.Mailers/HRDialogue/May06/05.05.06/hr_dialogue/landingpage.htm#IT)

timesjobs.com (citing The Economic Times) reports on the significance of possessing extracurricular activity in the job profile. It can be specifically noted that the emerging professionals who are able to work in a team and their access to build positive rapport with the other employees is a positive note as they can lead the company with their much integrated skills. These notions can be easily defined and related to a professional who has the knack for performing extra-curricular activities. Bikram Dasgupta, Chairman and CEO, Globsyn Group reflect that a hiring candidate with extracurricular abilities proves to be a potential employee as they found to be easily involved in the effective execution of their job tasks.

The job function for which a prospective candidate is being hired becomes the defining feature. For instance, in our organisation, if one is recruiting for a core sales function, we look at the candidates' vivacity, extrovertness, ability to connect to people, motivation to win etc, which to a large measure, can be judged by the candidates' participation in extra-curricular activities.

(<http://hireblog.timesjobs.com>)

timesjobs.com commends the job seekers to mention extracurricular activities in their resume. It is stressed that the fresh graduates need to realize the importance of extracurricular activities as it proves to be one of the most sought hiring tools in identifying the talent of the employees. In the monthly review of hire blogs, times.com reflects the views of Ramanand Padiyar, Global Head – HR, Kale Consultants Ltd.

A candidate having exposure to extracurricular activities indicates that he/she is sensitive, has the ability to work with people, has the perseverance in tracking issues to closures, owns up responsibility, has handled challenging situations, and is rational in expectation. In an increasingly interdependent and team working environment, these traits play a more important role than mere academics or for that matter, higher IQ.

(<http://hireblog.timesjobs.com>)

The companies have been hugely spending on talent searches and providing training to their fresh employees. They have to handle various assessment tools to evaluate the attitude and performance level of the graduate students. HR Personnel generally lament on this high level end fatigue process and the employers reckon for spending more on conducting in-service training programs on both communicational and technical domains. To reduce the cost of hiring candidates on a formal basis, recently many companies adopt social recruiting tools. It is given to understand that the companies are able to reduce the recruitment costs around 50% and hiring time about 40%. Yuvraj Bhatnagar, Director of Talent Acquisition at GlobalLogic shares about their success in bringing down their recruitment costs by adopting LinkedIn Talent Solutions as their social recruiting tools.

Social media hiring is a growing trend in the hiring industry and one has to understand its increasing importance as the entire world continues to go social.

(<http://talent.linkedin.com/blog/index.php/2013/10/how-to-build-a-high-performance-social-recruiting-team>)

linkedin.com reports on its talent blog page that the assimilation of professional and social network helps the employers to acknowledge diverse talents found in the employees. They can be able to identify the varied skill sets in both active and passive candidates and are able to place them in a more easy and convenient way. It can be recognized that an emerging professional needs to be well versed in both formal and social communication to attract the HR Personnel to recognize what skills and talents are store in them.

Job Status of Indian IT Professionals and their Employability Skills

Most of the engineering students are unable to get placements in both on and off campus recruitment drives. The placement rate of the students is marginally reduced due to economic regression and to the continuing dearth of quality and competency.

Most of the core companies like Infosys, Wipro, L&T, Tata, Airtel, Reliance and Ashok Leyland demand for potential employees with adequate language, strategic, technical and soft skills. They expect the prospective fresh employees with strong communication skills, organizational skills, innovative and flexible with good team leader capability (Dovey, 2006). They prefer the candidates to possess absolute business acumen to analyse and solve problems with the critical management ability. They consider that the employees need to possess have a flair for developing business with result oriented productivity. They anticipate the employees to be excellent in strategic communication, presentation and negotiation skills. They look forward the employees to work with team spirit and execute client interaction, marketing and sales skills. As the fresh engineering graduates are not found to be good in campus recruitment drives, the HR Personnel regret the present education and training provided in the academic curriculum. They emphasize on searching talented and capable professionals working on to achieve targets to develop and expand their business.

The unprecedented role of English in higher, technical and professional education envisages its importance in seeking employability. As English has become the lingua franca of higher education and profession, it has become mandatory to every graduate to converse in English to seek their dream jobs (Nickerson, 2005). Professional students need to learn relevant language and skills to engage in job related communicative tasks for developing competence. The IT industry is much concerned with the inadequate language skills of the engineering students and their lack of required skills for employability. Though recent and fresh plans of Indian government corroborate with the British council to provide sufficient training to teachers and to promote the communicative use of language, it is a long way to foresee the real use of communicating in English from primary to higher education. When the graduates are able to communicate fluently in English, India can certainly rise, achieve and sustain economic heights in the global commerce.

In an article on “The role of language skills” published in the section Education Plus, in The Hindu, November 30, 2009, Meera Srinivasan briefs the ideas of Sean Hayde, the Director of University of Cambridge ESOL examination that “English was no more “foreign language” and was increasingly perceived as a basic skill. In the present scenario, engineering students’ employability skills are solely depend on English communication skills. In a seminar on “Enhancing graduate engineers’ employability by developing their English language communication skills” organized by the University of Cambridge ESOL examination, it is generally acknowledged, “English language and communication skills are the basic skills that the industry is looking for in fresh graduates”.

Students need to be given enough awareness on communicating in English, as it is considered as the basic and most essential skills for employability. As English has become the corporate language of the world, the engineering students have

recognized the fact that it has become the gateway to enter into any industry. The most challenging task for them is to enrich their speaking and writing skills for effective business communication. They need to engage in interactional activities to develop discursive skills. They need to engage in oral presentations, interview, role-play, conversation and chatting for displaying interpersonal activities. And they should be capable to perform in group discussions, debate, meetings, public speaking, seminar, workshops and conferences for developing group communication activities. They should be able to present themselves in both interpersonal and group communication activities to face the national and international board meetings. Further, they need to write letter, email, report and project to survive in any business contexts (Gray, Emerson & MacKay, 2005). It is commonly observed that due to language and communication apprehension problems, the engineering students are not able to confidently communicate and their position for seeking employment are found at stake.

The students' inability to use English is generally due to their conceptual learning of the subjects in English, but they never attempted to use it in real interactions. It can be also acknowledged that due to their lack of confidence, they lack presentation skills too (Tucker, 2011). This affects their attitudes and behavior. Obviously, they are not able to indulge in formal and social communications. These are the core verbal and soft skills problems one can encounter in the course of workplace communication. Interviews and group discussions, debates, seminars and conferences highlight the degree of indulgence, participation and performance behind their speaking skills. What one exactly thinks, it needs to be revealed instantly. Interaction is highly evident only through speaking skills. However, one may be competent in subject knowledge, but if they are not competent in exhibiting communication skills, it will make them null and void in presenting their knowledge and information and thus kindles career destruction.

To expertise and excel in communication, one should develop the act of presenting their thoughts and ideas in an eloquent style. Easy communication can be witnessed if one is bestowed with good language and ability to deliver it in a realistic way. Bombastic words and pompous style will not suffice for easy communication. The natural outflow of thoughts and lucid style is a criterion for easy communication. In speaking, the persons could be participated in the group, whereas, writing is an individual exercise. Counselling and convincing a person on any ground could be made possible only through the skills of speaking. Sharing ideas and exchanging information can be done through professional communication. One can come into immediate contact and understanding through interpersonal and group communication. Through public speaking and mass communication skills, global audience can be attracted instantly. Expressing spontaneous thoughts is easy and comfortable while one engages in conversation. The level of participation and performance is great while one actively engages in communication.

The professional needs to know where they could express their ideas and how should be revealed it in formal or informal means; how could they say it in subjective and objective ways; or they could be able to discriminate whether it should be conveyed it in assertive, descriptive or explanatory mode. Keeping reserved in a discussion in meetings is unhealthy and remaining silent or solemn when you need to explain will distract and mislead the whole communication. A speaker and listener needs to understand what they truly expect and respond in communication. When an adequate form of language lacks in a communicative situation, communication is totally disillusioned. It is anticipated that to expand business and to attend international business seminars, speaking is necessary. Informative knowledge on the subject, personal and social attitudes, language skills and strategic competence complement one another in the process of communication. If one element is missing, the combined effect is reduced.

Signalling Human Resource Development in India

The fresh employees need to be provided inplant training to improve their job related communication skills. To seek career advancements, irrespective of the job positions the employees are always inclined to improve communication skills too (Sadanand, 1993). Their keen interest to seek job related training have mushroomed many private consultancies to offer training programs and to analyze the demands of the varied job-specific positions in the workplace. Professional Training and Development consultants counsel technical students as soon as they leave the higher secondary school. Their academic and professional guidance is sought by both the students and institution. They act as a bridge in providing training to the add-on and bridge courses that is not offered in the academic curriculum. They provide placement training to the students in the educational institutions and in-service training to the companies. They act as corporate trainers and their role is significantly attributed in providing specific needs based trainings to meet the immediate requirements of both education and profession. Both the institutional management and companies consult them to update their professional requirements. They discuss about the mode of the recruitment process and prevailing job vacancies in the leading companies. As they interpret the company's demands, their guidance is consistently revealed in the due course of their career training and advancements.

Many independent consultancies design short term training courses and skills assessment programs for engineering and management courses. Their initiatives to provide career guidance and skill development orientations helped them to challenge the open job market competitions and seek placements. They are exercised to develop communication skills, analytical skills and soft skills. The professional consultants and HR Personnel jointly consider that these are the most demanded employability skills that an emerging professional should possess along with their technical knowledge and relevant job domain skills. P. Kartick Pai, Manager,

Coramandel Electronics considering the importance of aptitude skills, stresses that logical and analytical thinking should be improved. All the HR Personnel claim that both verbal and nonverbal communication skills need to be practiced. Anitha Nancy, HR – Executive (Training), Thales Software India Pvt. Ltd. stresses on developing word power and accent training. Mr. B. Ravichandran, Assistant Manager, Tata Communications Ltd. regards that interpersonal communication helps the candidate to communicate. It can be noted that listening skills are important in displaying speaking skills. Karthikeyan, HR Executive, ISGN asserts that effective communication skills and mastery in language is important in all aspects of job execution.

Needs analysis can be conducted to understand relevant job specific skills to satisfy the requirements of employers and emerging professionals (Fatihi, 2003). With the specification of required skills to communicate effectively, needs based courses can be developed to provide restricted communicative competence (Widdowson, 1983). Academic and workplace communication has been the most recommended area for developing communicative language learning. How language and communication is affected with the changing scenario of needs based target situations? should be realized by the educationists, teachers and students. The context of survival syllabuses greeting a friend, calling a colleague for a party, meeting in a restaurant, reservation of a flight ticket have been gradually relocated the contexts of “calling a student for oral presentation, discussing a topic with friends, engaging in a small talk on any current affairs, sharing ideas in resolving an issue, conversing with peers on any technical instrument, writing an email, writing a report on any incident, writing for inviting a guest to preside a symposium, writing diaries for narrative and expository writing, writing suggestions and recommendations to solve a problem, writing scientific and technical process descriptions, writing proposals to undertake a project, comparing project analysis are some of the situations where communicative language teaching from survival to academic and workplace communication is facilitated. These tasks are again reinforced to provide job specific training on any particular genres to promote better skills for professional communication.

Professionals need to improve their personality related to cognitive, affective and psychomotor factors that will enrich their knowledge management and displaying their abilities. The cognitive, affective and psychological motors of any individual affect language and communication behavior. In sharing and exchanging ideas, thoughts, messages and information, one can understand the attitudes of the interlocutor. Soft skills are essentially important in distinguishing personality. Intelligent quotient (IQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ) abilities should be the integrated components of communicative competency as it reflects on manifesting constructive communication in keeping up business fervour and human relations. Though it is assumed that the urban candidates are able to communicate better

than the students hailing from villages, all the HR Personnel stress that all the students irrespective of their background and culture, need to develop employability skills.

Conclusion

The engineering students aspire to inherit interpersonal and group communication skills to develop communicative competency and building network in both social and business ventures. They need to continuously scrutinize their workplace demands and should be able to satisfy their employers with their technical and strategic communicative abilities. They need to elevate the company to global standards and should be able to gain career advancements with the growth of the company. They should be able to emerge as a potential and successful employee to serve in both onshore and overseas.

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