

A Research Study on Importance of Soft Skills Hospitality Industry - A Student's Perception

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Abstract

The primary goal is to highlight the value of soft skills for students who want to work in the hospitality sector as a career. The hospitality sector is always in need of individuals who can ensure the comfort and happiness of their clients or guests. The development of soft skills can give employees in this business a foundation to manage their work and foster their creativity while carrying out their duties. For employees working in this industry, it can be fairly challenging to remain composed and operate under pressure. The distinction between the many soft skills required to develop a hotel professional is based on the significance of these soft talents, as well as the techniques or approaches to developing soft skills. The hospitality business employs a lot of skilled and semi-skilled people, so it's important for semi-skilled workers to learn soft skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Hospitality Industry, Students

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is a field that requires an unique mix of skills. The staff is expected to have a physical hard skill, along with a perfect blend of soft skills. Soft skills are difficult to teach in a traditional classroom. According to the Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management in 2015, "The hospitality workplace requires skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, maintaining professional and ethical standards, and leadership". In a 2013 Employer Skills Survey, it was said that, "Four of the top five skills hospitality applicants are lacking are soft skills". The survey summarized, "122,000 workers in retail and food services in the UK will be held back by a lack of soft skills". The results found 55% of those surveyed lacked customer handling skills, 53% lacked organization skills, 51% lacked oral communication skills, and 44% lacked teamwork skills.

The main purpose of the study is to reveal importance of soft skills for students wish to make their career in the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry always needs people who can keep their guests or clients happy and comfortable. For the employee working in this industry it is quite difficult to stay calm and work under pressure, hence development of soft skills can provide them a base to manage their work and enhance their creativity while they are performing their jobs.

On the basis of importance of these soft skills, we identify different soft skills which are necessary to develop an hotel professional and also the methods or ways to develop soft skills. Hospitality industry is an large employer of skilled and semi-skilled workers, and to for semi-skilled workers development of soft skills becomes necessary to develop themselves and make them more capable of handling situations. After finding out different methods and ways of developing soft skills from different literatures we can ask students, which one of them are more suitable and effective for them.

After taking suggestions opinions from students bon soft skills developing methods, we segregate the important methods for students. since the college environment and the age (18-23) is an crucial time for students to choose a best way and develop themselves according to their career profile, for the students willing to be a part of the hospitality industry this study can help to develop their soft skills by giving them a Idea that what soft skills are exactly and what are best possible ways to develop them. On the basis of research we can also look forward to find out how does soft skills help in the hospitality industry and also how soft skills accompany the hard skills which is about technical knowledge or skills. This study is based on different literatures and questionnaire floated in students of hotel management colleges in Pune City.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To recognize if the students studying hospitality understand the importance of soft skills in their career path.
- To identify the various methods used to train hospitality students in soft skills.
- To know about the importance of the soft skills required in the hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grover J. (Russ) Whitehurst (2016)

The study focuses on impact of school education on students soft skills. The role played by teachers developing the soft skills of students. Also practical steps which should be followed in schools both develop soft skills in students like: 1) focusing on improving student behavior, not personality traits; 2) implementing school wide rule systems focused on respectful social interactions; 3) using measures of soft skills that are naturally occurring and useful as feedback at the classroom and individual level; 4) establishing priorities around students who are significantly off-track in their social-emotional behavior or self-management skills; 5) establishing priorities around remediation or removal of teachers whose interpersonal behavior toward students is likely to be doing harm; and 6) putting in place systematic ways to learn from and improve the reform efforts.

Jane Andrews and Helen Higson (2008)

The aim of the study was to conceptualize and identify key individual- and business-related skills and competencies required by employers of business graduates and holders of other higher level qualifications, and to discover whether higher education business programmers are meeting the needs of the European marketplace. Also compares between soft skills and hard business knowledge for graduate employability.

Bernd Schulz (2008)

The study makes a survey of the importance of soft skills in students' lives both at college and after college. It discusses how soft skills complement hard skills, which

are the technical requirements of a job the student is trained to do. The paper exhorts educators to take special responsibility regarding soft skills, because during students' university time, educators have major influence on the development of their students' soft skills. Embedding the training of soft skills into hard skills courses is a very effective and efficient method of achieving both an attractive way of teaching a particular content and an enhancement of soft skills. Soft skills fulfil an important role in shaping an individual's personality. It is of high importance for every student to acquire adequate skills beyond academic or technical knowledge.

Meenu Watts and Rakesh Kumar Watts (2009)

The study was undertaken in the most dynamic city of India, Chandigarh also recognized as knowledge city, where almost all types of educational facilities and job opportunities bare available. The study tries to understand the awareness, need and importance of soft skills in students, type of course/projects/activities initiated by varied educational institutions at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, their relevance, teaching - learning process, their input in developing soft skills and benefits to students. The paper presents the findings of the above study. The paper also puts forward some suggestions for making above initiatives more effective for developing students fully equipped with relevant soft skills.

Alleah Crawford and Melvin R. Weber (okl; 4688s 2016)

They stated in the study differences between hard and soft skills plus work benefits when soft skills are present among employees, also they have analyse human resources functions that allow for soft skills development. Study mainly focuses on the importance of soft skills for hospitality leaders and how important it is to develop the it among them. The study also presents soft skill results.

Jennifer Kim Lian Chan (2011)

This study examines the key issues of graduate employability and their attainment of soft skills within the higher learning institution. It highlights the importance of soft skills and the lack of the same amongst graduates when seeking employment. Subsequently, it discusses

the implementation and attainment of soft skills with reference to the tourism and hotel management programmers. It also points out that Malaysian local universities or educators must ensure the attainment of soft skills by graduates via teaching and learning activities, the application of the student centered learning approach and the provision of adequate opportunities for undergraduates to communicate, develop higher order thinking skills and solve real-life problems. The paper shares a conceptual framework of soft skills and methods as well as common approaches to develop soft skills among graduates; recommendations for enhancing graduate employability are proposed. It suggests that incorporating soft skills into the academic curriculum is vital.

Melvin R. Weber, Alleah Crawford, Junghoon (Jay) Lee and Dori Dennison (2013)

The purpose of this project was to extend previous research on soft skill competencies in hospitality management by developing a tool that identifies the necessary soft skill competencies of entry-level managers. This project asked human resource (HR) professionals to rate the relative importance of soft skill competencies found in the literature and to determine the importance of each of the seven categories of soft skill competencies. This study used a convenience sample of members in the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), with a variety of job titles from President/CEO to HR Specialist.

Daniela Wilks and Kevin Hemsworth (2013)

This study seeks to identify the competencies perceived as essential for hospitality industry leaders. Additionally, it offers some reflections upon hospitality management higher education and examines the structure of Portuguese undergraduate degrees in order to discuss whether the current educational offer matches specific industry demand. Both the literature review and the results of a survey with a sample of hoteliers indicate that soft skills are consistently rated as being the most important to effective performance in the field. On the other hand, an assessment of the undergraduate hospitality management programmes currently on offer in Portugal show a deficit in this area. Some recommendations are presented to redress the evident discrepancies between educational programme content and perceived industry needs. In

particular the study proposes the adoption and tutelage of student by industry managers, here referred to as “adopting a student”.

Erwin Losekoot, Earney Lasten, Anne Lawson and Beverly Chen (2018)

This study considers the value of industrial placements in providing an opportunity for hospitality students to develop soft skills in the workplace in addition to the technical skills learned at their educational establishments. While there are concepts such as “problem-based learning” which help students to think across subject silos, this paper argues that internships offer a valuable opportunity for students to learn and for industry to promote their organisations to prospective employees. Using a year’s worth of student workplace diaries, the researchers identify that, in addition to hard skills, students learn communication skills, professionalism, teamwork and personal development. The paper concludes by suggesting that this exploratory analysis of student diaries demonstrates the importance of internships, but that more could be done to increase their value and to make the industry attractive to prospective employees. Opportunities for further research include more gathering and analysis of these documents which give voice to the lived experience of hospitality students on placement.

Shaheen Majid, Zhang Liming, Shen Tong and Siti Raihana (2012)

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students’ perceptions of the importance of soft skills for their education and employment. A questionnaire was used for data collection and 188 undergraduate business management students from four universities in Singapore participated in this study. It was found that a majority of the respondents felt that soft skills were useful for social interaction as well as for career advancement. However, they did not think that these skills contribute considerably to their academic performance. The top five important soft skills identified by the students were: teamwork and collaboration, decision-making, problem-solving, time management and critical thinking skills. This paper suggests certain measures for improving soft skills of students which may also help improve their employment perspectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly focused on importance of skills in hospitality industry from a student’s point of view. So, students from various hotel management institutes of Pune University are taken into consideration for the study. For collection of data from these students from different institutions of Pune University researcher have adopted a questionnaire method. A well-structured questionnaire was floated among students of hotel management institutes. The sample size comprises of students from various hotel management institutes of Pune University.

Primary: For collection of primary data the questionnaire is floated between students from hotel management colleges of Pune University. Students are asked different types of questions based on the objective of the study.

Secondary: For the collection of secondary data various literatures available on the Google scholar. Data like types of soft skills, methods adopted for data collection etc.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

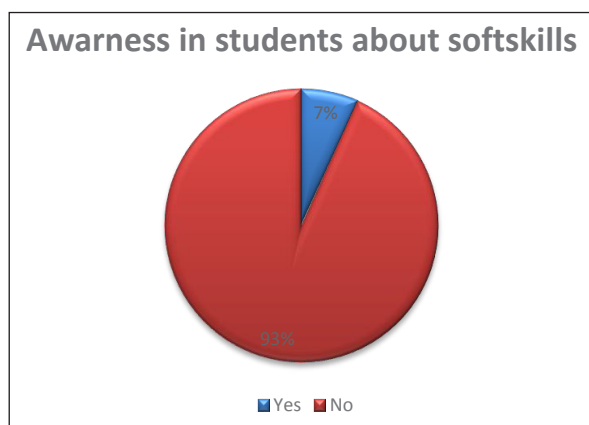


Fig. 1

Observation (Fig. 1)

Above figure shows that how many students from respondents are aware about soft skills.

- As per the responses collected using the selected random sampling method the Fig. 1 shows 93.3 percent of students from all responders are aware of soft skills which are required in the industry apart from the technical skills.

- The red colour represents the students that are aware about soft skills Whereas, blue colour represents 6.7 percent students of the selected population are not aware about soft skills applicable in the hotel industry.

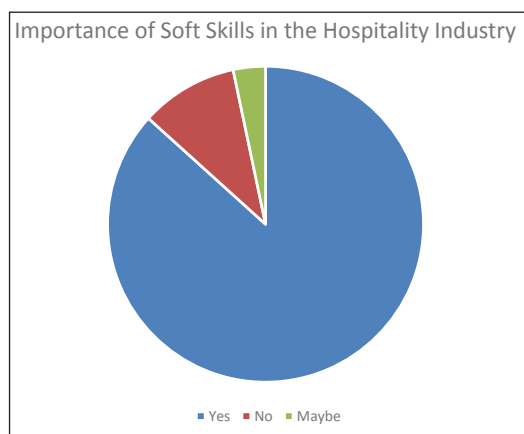


Fig. 2

Observation (Fig. 2)

Above figure indicates students’ opinion of the important role played by soft skills in industry.

Out of the total students from whom the responses were collected, there are different opinions on same question whether they think soft skills play important role in industry.

- In the pie chart, red colour shows the total percent of students that think soft skills does not play an important role in hospitality industry, which is 3.3%.
- Colour green depicts the students who cannot say or they don’t know whether soft skills play an important role in hospitality industry or not. 10% of the total students from whom responses were collected are of the opinion that they cannot say.
- Colour blue indicated those students who strongly believed that soft skills really play an important role in their hospitality career. And about 86.70% of the students from whom samples were collected think that soft skills are important for the hospitality industry just like technical skills.
- The figure basically tells that there is a majority of students who strongly think or believed that soft skills play an important role in hospitality sector where there are plenty of challenges which a hospitality professional has to face.

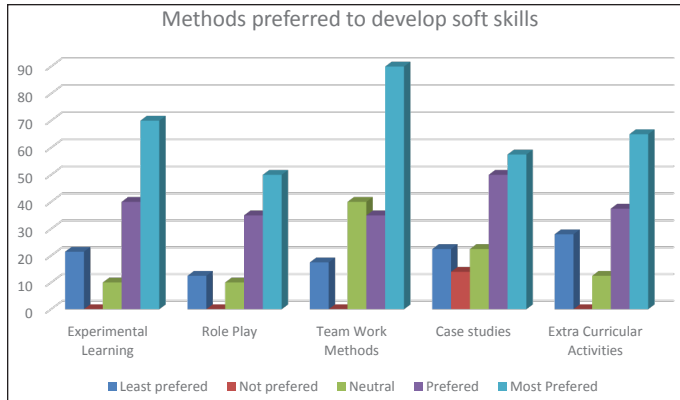


Fig. 3

Observation (Fig. 3)

Fig. 3 represents different methods adopted in institutions to develop soft skills in students and the preferences of students learning soft skills. 40 respondents prefer it and

- According to respondent’s experimental learning is least preferred by about 22 respondents, 10 respondents are neutral, and about 70 respondents feel it’s the most preferred method of learning required soft skills for the hospitality industry.
- Role play method of learning soft skills is least preferred by 13 respondents, 10 respondents are neutral, 35 respondents prefer learning soft skills using role play method and about 50 respondents feel it’s the most preferred way of learning soft skills.
- Team work method of developing soft skills is least preferred by 18 respondents, 40 respondents are neutral, as per 35 respondents its preferred and 90 respondents feel that it’s the most preferred method of developing soft skills.
- Case study method is least preferred by 18 respondents, 14 respondents so not prefer case study method at all, 23 respondents are neutral, 50 respondents prefer the method and about 58 respondents are of the opinion that it’s the most preferred method to learn and develop soft skills.
- The above graph shows that extracurricular activities in the hospitality education institutions is least preferred by 57 respondents, 13 responses are neutral, 38 respondents feel that its preferred and 60 feel its most preferred method for development of soft skills.
- The highest preferred method by the respondents is Team work method to develop the soft skills set

required in the hospitality industry as per the responses collected from students. Very small number of students say role play method can also be used to develop soft skills.

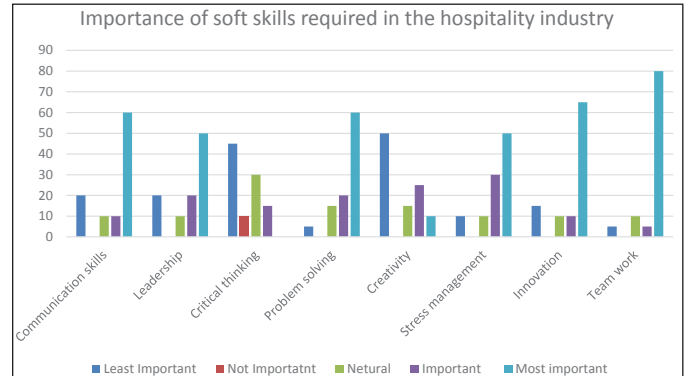


Fig. 4

Observation (Fig. 4)

Above graph reflects importance of different soft skills required in the hospitality industry from the point of view of students.

- Out of the total respondents 20 are of he opinion that Communication skills are least important, 10 are neutral, 10 feel that its important and 60 feel that its most important. soft skill in the hospitality industry.
- 20 respondents feel that leadeship requires least importance in the soft skills in the hospitality industry, 10 are netural, 20 think that it is important, 60 feel that its very important.
- As per the respondents critical thinking is barely re- lated to soft skill, 45 repondents are of the opinion that it is least important, 10 feel its not important, 30 are netural, 15 feel its important.
- As per the respondents in problem solving in the hospitality industry soft skills are least important for the point of view of 5 respondents, 15 respondants have a neutral opinion, 20 feel its important and about 60 feel its very important.
- Creativity is a parameter which as per the responses 50 feel its least important, 15 are netural, 25 feel important and 10 feel most important.
- Stress management requires soft skills in hospitality industry is the opinion of 50 respondents say that it is most important, 30 feel its important, 10 are netural and 10 feel its least important.

- Innovation requires soft skills in hospitality industry is the opinion of 65 respondents say that it is most important, 10 feel its important, 10 are neutral and 15 feel its least important.
- Time management is a parameter which as per the responses 35 feel its least important, 10 are neutral, 45 feel important and 10 feel most important.
- Team work is a parameter which as per the responses 5 feel its least important, 10 are neutral, 5 feel important and 80 feel most important.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Overall, the implications of above findings suggest that the hospitality industry students should focus on development of their soft skills along with the technical skills and technical knowledge.
- The institutions should also focus on developing soft skills of their students by using different methods, that will train students to perform their job more efficiently in the industry.
- The hotel companies should also focus on adopting different methods to develop soft skills of semi-skilled employees in the hotel industry, this will result in a satisfied customers and professional work atmosphere.
- As hospitality industry is growing industry and students getting recruited in any position need to deal with guest as well as with other staff hence having soft skills training will help them perform better and grow in their organisation.
- Findings also say that some of the students are not aware of soft skills and its importance in the industry, at the institute level as well as at the entry level training the students should be taught about soft skills using various tools.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the soft skills has an very important role to play in the hospitality industry and almost 93.3% of the students are aware about it , and almost 87.70% of the students think that soft skills are very important if you want to be successful in the industry. Students are willing to adopt different methods, to develop soft skills and become successful leaders in the industry.

Students also have rated different soft skills according to their importance in the industry. Various tools adopted by hotel management institutes to develop the soft skills of the students like, experimental learning, team work, role play, case studies and extracurricular activities. The most preferred method of enhancing soft skills is using team work is the response of majority students.

Hospitality industry has a various important attributes that need soft skills like communication skills, leadership, stress management, innovation, team work etc., Team work is where most soft skill is required as services are provided to the guest as an entire hotel and not only by individual teams.

After this all findings study clearly indicates the students perception towards importance of soft skills in the hospitality industry. As soft skills are the skills that are required to handle people in general, and hospitality is a people oriented industry.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Students studying in hotel management institutes of Pune University city are taken into consideration while floating the questionnaire among the students.
- 100 students have been sent questionnaire for collection of the primary data for this study.
- The perception of the industry and the requirement of the industry is not taken into consideration here.

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APPENDIX

Sample Questionnaire

- Name
- College
- Are you aware what is soft skills?
- Do you think soft skills play important role in hospitality industry?
- What method you would prefer to develop soft skills?
 1. Experimental learning
 2. Role play
 3. Team work methods
 4. Case studies
 5. Extracurricular activities
- How important you think these skills are. Please rate 5 as most important and 1 as least important
 1. Communication skills
 2. Leadership
 3. Critical thinking
 4. Problem solving
 5. Creativity
 6. Stress management
 7. Innovation
 8. Cultural awareness
 9. Team work