Embedding soft skills and business skills into technical IT papers

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Abstract

This paper reviews the various soft skills and business skills and how they can be included in IT papers. Soft skills can be part of assessments. Various business skills should be part of some IT paper's learning outcomes.

Keywords

Soft skills, business skills, technical skill, assessment, IT paper

Introduction

Hard skills are cognitive in nature and measured by Intelligence Quotient (IQ), while soft skills are behavioural and measured by Emotional Quotient (EQ). Hard skills can be easily measured for a student by assessing the learning outcomes of the technical paper. However there is no norm to assess the soft skills in an assessment.

It has been supported by research that along with technical skills, soft skills are an important requirement by employers especially when employing new graduates.

Merely passing a paper like Business Communication in an IT course is not sufficient. Many students do not appreciate the importance of soft skills at the beginning of their study. Core business skills are equally important along with soft skills in order to prepare students for the workplace. It is desirable that more attention and focus be given to these skills in an IT paper.

Learning outcomes prescribed in a technical paper emphasise technical knowledge. This technical knowledge can be demonstrated by the student in various ways through assessments. It is desirable that soft skills and business skills are embedded in the assessments so students can demonstrate their proficiency in these skill sets.

Literature Review

Several papers have been published in NACCQ conferences on the relevance of soft skills for IT professionals (Snell, Snell-Siddle, Whitehouse 2002, 2003). These and other papers list the various soft skills (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay 2002). Soft skills have been provided through additional workshops.

Business skills are also an important aspect for IT professionals in the workplace (Bassellier, Benbasat 2004). IT cannot solve business problems in isolation. A thorough understanding of the business organisation is important to build business functionalities and for strategic planning. The business case studies undertaken in assessment should reflect the student's business competence in a scaled down version so as to make the assessment achievable. The assessment should include reflective questions on scalability

and performance problems as in an enterprise application or website development.

Methodology

Literatures on the importance of soft and business skills in technical courses are researched. The core soft skills and business skills required for graduates seeking IT jobs are identified. The course prescriptions of various IT papers were studied that the skills acquired by the students can be ascertained through assessments.

What soft skills are required to be embedded in the IT paper assessments?

What business skills are needed to help students to be true IT professionals?

The list of soft skills and business skills are presented in Table 1.

Soft Skills	Business Skills
Team work	Accounting
Presentation	Legislation to IT Industry
Written Communication	Business Organisation Structure
Attire	Ethics
Grooming	Strategic Information Systems Planning
Self Confidence	Competitive Strategies for Business
Willingness to Learn	
Relationship Building	
Interpersonal Communication	

Table 1: List of soft skills and business skills

Conclusion

The set of soft skills in Table 1 can be part of the marking criteria in the assessments. Some skills like written communication and basic business skills like accounting, legislation to IT industry, business organisation structure, and ethics should be covered through formal papers and also embedded as part of the practical component of technical papers. Soft skills are harder to assess while business skills are readily assessable.

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