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SOFT SKILLS IN CAREER SUCCESS: A CONSTRUCTIVIST INQUIRY

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Abstract

The study considers the alternative research paradigm by explaining the procedure of writing constructivist research papers with an emergent issue- soft skills in career success. 'Skill' can be considered as under researched construct. It can be undervalued if it is not properly executed. Both 'hard skill' and 'soft skill' are complementary to each other. Hard Skill can be known as technical learnable skill which is applied to perform a certain task. 'Soft Skill' used to indicate personal transversal competencies including communication, decision making, problem solving ability etc. The study upholds ten dimensions of soft skills by applying hermeneutic dialectic methodology including five respondents from different perspectives. The study solicits with major claims, concerns and issues regarding soft skills by applying convenient personal interview methods. The study come up with a declaration that, soft skills are the prerequisite in this global competition and consider as employability skills that stands beside hard skill. To make competent our next generation there is no alternative to initiate the support system of providing soft skills related learning.

Keywords: *Constructivist, soft skills, personal competencies*

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization; raising the capacity of knowledge, enhancing creativity and innovation are the crucial elements to success in the workplace (Ngang, & Chan, 2015). Human resources are termed as the fundamental component for achieving success. Knowledge stands as fundamental requirement accompanying with skills for building human competency. Peoples with appropriate skills are needed not only for workplace but also for everyday life. Skills can be classified into, 'hard' skills and 'soft' skills. Both hard skills and soft skills are arguably imperative to succeed in a particular professional job. The term 'hard skills' which incorporates with technical or administrative procedures related to an organization's core business on the other hand 'soft skill' that refers to personalities, attributes, qualities and personal behavior of individuals (Majid et. al., 2012). Appropriate soft skills play a vital role in maintaining successful career as well as for social interaction in the society. Soft Skills can be used to clearly indicate all the competences that are not directly associated to a specific task; they mainly refer to the relationships with other people involved in the organization. Hard Skills, on the other hand, indicate the specific capabilities to perform a particular job (Cimatti, 2016). Most commonly soft

skills can be categorized into three major criteria personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and problem solving & decision making skills (Shakir, 2009). These skills are intangible in nature only a keen observation can bring out the personality of a person over time. These are, therefore, being looked upon as critical traits one needs to have for career growth (Padhi, 2014).

As we know business scenario is becoming more and more complex, it is difficult for one person to survive only with the hard skills. Soft skills can be termed as strategic element which deserves high attention from the perspective of human resource management. We can say it is the soft skills depending upon which quality of industry; quality of product, innovation, quality of job etc can rely on (Cimatti, 2016).

Soft skills or people skills are typically rigid to monitor, quantify and measure. These skills are mandatory for everyday life as much as they are needed for work. Soft skills usually includes; how people relate to each other by communicating, listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meetings and resolving conflict(Padhi, 2014).

After the discovery of the big 5 personality dimension; scholars emphasizes on soft skills. Behavioral science researchers in psychology and economics insisted that soft skills play a significant role in the workplace and determine success. In any organization soft skills is critical for implementing any change, transformation purposes e.g. dealings with suppliers, partners or customers etc (Holmberg, 2007; Holmberg & Hribar, 2016). The greatest feature of soft skills is that the application of these skills is not limited to one's profession. So it can be claim that for survival reason of the organization both large and small business owners and employees must possess some skills that is influencing, relationship building, managing and controlling the workforce that is known as soft skills.

The study tries to determine the perception regarding soft skills by a group of human resources; managers in marketing, HR officer along with past experience in teaching and an entrepreneur; by adopting constructivism research paradigm. A person in marketing field has to deal with multiple personalities. For all the activities, personalities require a high degree of emotional intelligence, leadership ability, planning ability, critical thinking with proper planning. All this tasks require soft skills. On the other side our education system is more concerned with general education but it is high time we need to include soft skills developing curriculum from our primary level. This clearly indicates soft skill based teaching ability. This fierce competition of globalization also indicates that, employer will not select the employee; considering only job description or specification but also wants to see how they demonstrate sound communication, leadership and team building qualities. The study also considers soft skill of the entrepreneur; who are considered as idea people. The business of entrepreneur begins with idea that certainly emphasizes on soft skills. This study open up a scope to bring the issues of soft skills in career success by accompanying claims, concerns & issues with above respective areas respondents.

2. Objectives

This study is a preliminary attempt to identify the most desired soft skills and evaluate the influence of soft skills in career success. The study reveals how respondent felt about their soft skills, their consent about career success and impact of soft skills on their career while entering, operating in their respective workforce.

3. Literature Review

Many studies reveal the importance of soft skills in preparing students, entrepreneur and so on. Considering the above, the study has taken the issue of soft skills and career success in the ground of alternative research paradigm, more specifically constructivism research paradigm; because it offers a philosophical alternative to the logical positivism. Moyeen (1998) explained that a research paradigm comprises a basic set of belief structure or set of assumptions on which a researcher conducts research activities explicitly or implicitly. The ontological, epistemological

and methodological assumptions constitute the structure of belief for a particular research paradigm (Moyeen, 1998; Creswell, 2002).

Constructivism approach focuses on the ontological and epistemological ground. The Constructivist belief structure relies on relativist ontology where multiple social constructed realities exist (Moyeen, 1995). It also believes that realities are the mental construction of individuals which constructed through the process of individual's interaction with environment. The joint constructions can be formed by the dialectic construction of the respondent. From the perspective of generalization it can be said that, constructivism approach borrow the term 'working hypothesis'. The working hypotheses are tentative where findings can at best be working hypotheses not a conclusion depending upon the situation (Guba & Lincohln, 1985). Constructivism approach depends on mutual simultaneous shaping which implies that everything influences everything. The change can occur mutually and simultaneously (Moyeen, 1995). Constructivism relies on monistic subjectivist epistemology; where inquirer and inquired are intertwined. Constructivist position eliminates the ontology- epistemology distinction, further it generates improved and sophisticated construction that based on the precise interaction of the researcher and respondents. In this study, interpretations of data uphold the joint construction of the researcher and respondents. In the methodological ground, constructivism proposes hermeneutic methodology where the aim of the study is to arrive at a shared and sophisticated construction by arriving at a consensus. From the above discussion it is clear that coherence of ontology, epistemology and methodology can best be achieved by constructivism.

4. Methodology

This study is a qualitative type research which is concerned with meaning making (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Rodwell, 1998), as the researcher proposes constructivist research paradigm, it involves with hermeneutic dialectic methodology. The study took place in the city of Dhaka initially proposed to 10 participants but data collection ceased after the 5 participants interviewed because transmission of information occurred at that point. The study ensures credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as trustworthiness of the assessment which is followed after data interpretation. The researcher has taken purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a method in which respondents are selected by the researcher, based on a variety of criteria that may include specialist knowledge of the research issue and/or capacity, willingness to participate in the research. Sample size and brief description about respondents: Sample sizes, therefore depend on the resources and time available as well as the study's objectives (Oliver, 2013; Ray, 2012). In this study a total of five respondents are selected.

No of respondents	
Marketing Area	2
HR with Teaching	1
HR	1
Entrepreneur	1

The selection criteria were depends on basically who uses soft skills into their daily working life. Persons engaged in marketing activities usually tend to have high soft skills than others. So the study first began with selecting respondent who is in a managerial position in branding department of a reputed company and the other is a manager in marketing department from a multinational company.

In the second turn, two respondents were purposefully selected from HR background, because they also have to use soft skills as they regularly engaged themselves with counseling, training, updating and most importantly handles large workforce in an organization. From the respondents one had a teaching experience also.

In the third turns, one respondent were chosen from the entrepreneur perspective. An entrepreneur has to deal with so many challenges and regularly use their soft skills on the way for their success

in their career. The study engaged in-depth, semi structured interviews and observation. The data collected from the respondents then converted into 'Hermeneutic Dialectic Methodology'.

Data were collected through in depth, semi structured interviews and observation. Interview schedule explored these respondents knowledge about soft skills of their own, its uses throughout their career, positive and negative aspect, its implications to their career etc. Interview questions were asked in an open-ended fashion to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data' (Kvale, 1994; Patton, 1990, P. 295).The questions asked in the period of interview allowed the participants to express their opinions, concerns, issues, feelings, thereby allowing the conversation to flow where it needed to understand their meaning regarding soft skills and career success.

Data analysis began after the first interview and continued until the preparation of the case study report. The responses from the respondents were ensured by the interactive process. The study initiates working hypotheses including with their claims, concerns and issues about soft skills and its effect on career success. According to Guba & Lincoln (1989) 'claim' stand as an declaration introduced by the stakeholder that was favorable while 'concern' as unfavorable and 'issue' implied any state of affairs about which reasonable person may disagree. The study adopts fourth generation evaluation proposed by them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In the first phase, the respondents are identified and are solicited for those claims concerns and issues relating with the soft skills and career success. The second phase claims concerns and issues raised by the respondents are introduced to all other groups for their comment, reaction etc. In this phase responses are negotiated with other respondents. The third phase claims concerns and issues those are not resolved become the advance organizer for collection of information. Joint construction is made in this phase. In the fourth phase, renegotiation among the stake holders takes place.

This study has taken fourth generation evaluation along with hermeneutic dialectic cycle according to Guba & Lincoln (1989). According to this cycle, initially respondent R1, is chosen on the basis of convenience. In an interview, respondent were asked to describe the claims concern and issues about soft skills and its effect on the career success. All possible attempts were made to raise the respondent's original construction. The respondent was asked to nominate another respondent. Second respondents were selected from the same background but in a different company. The third respondent was from different department and it was helpful for the study so that, it can conclude with multiple responses. By this time the responses from the R1 was decoded. After that decoding, themes, concepts, ideas, values, claims, concerns and issues raised by the R1 again go for the verification process in member check step; to ensure the original message. So the ultimate construction C1 was made after analyzing in details. Respondent 2 was also asked by the same procedure. R2 was also interested to describe the feeling of her own journey. Constructions from the R1 also placed before him. In this stage he adds some comments and issues on these constructions that later helps a lot in this study. After that it was time to get feedback from another respondent from different perspective. However while making the summary, there saw some similar essence from which both respondent were strongly agree. After decoding the thought of the R2, it was time for member checking before going to make construction 2. C2 was prepared successfully by identifying some important point. The C1 and C2 construction again placed to the respondent 3 who was from HR and Teaching background. C3 construction made with adding some sophisticated points. Again C1, C2, C3 construction placed before the respondent from HR background. Here C4 constructions made, and then finally all the construction along with new idea was placed to the respondent from entrepreneur background. The study concludes with construction (C1-C5) having the interview of one to fifth respondent by soliciting with some dimensions of soft skills that are commonly used by them and have evidently succeeded in their career.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. The implications of the soft skills

Respondents were asked about their opinions regarding claims, concerns and issues about soft skills and career success:

It is the soft skills that possess different definition regarding different cultures, places and hierarchies (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, 2010). The meaning of soft skills depends upon the nature of the workforce and certainly different from one organization to another (Jackson, 2009). The respondents are also from different background and have given different opinion. But following are given some essences of the respondents' opinion, on which all of them gave almost same claims regarding soft skills. The study segregates into four phases:

- First phase (Solicitation),
- Second phase (Negotiation)
- Third phase (Joint Construction)
- Fourth phase(Re negotiate)

In the First phase, all the respondents were given the following thought that presents in some key words. The claims, concerns and issues are raised by each respondent in the second phase and third phase. In the fourth phase of stage, some issues remain unsolicited regarding claims, concerns and issues.

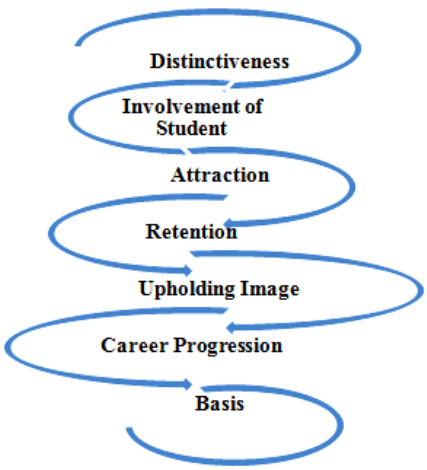


Figure-1: The implications of the soft skills that are described by the respondents.

First respondent urges that, 'Soft skills help to distinct one person from another'.

From the second respondent it has been found that, soft skills help in involving of students /people as well as attraction and retention of them. It also helps in upholding the image of the organization. It also helps in progression of one's career.

Another respondent said that, it is a basis for entrepreneurship.

There is more evidence that a combination of industry core skills plus a broader set of interpersonal skills, including effective communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, and critical thinking are a must for any individual who wants to have a place and be successful in the workforce (Athey & Orth, 1999)

5.2. Soft skill dimension and its influence on career:

The respondents of this study underline some of the key features of soft skills that they think effective for their career success. The respondents have given some dimensions of soft skills often they use in their practical life. Some of the dimensions of soft skills applied by all the respondents

(communication, interactive skills, critical decision making) and they claim it as weapon for their career success. The claims that given by the respondents are given below:

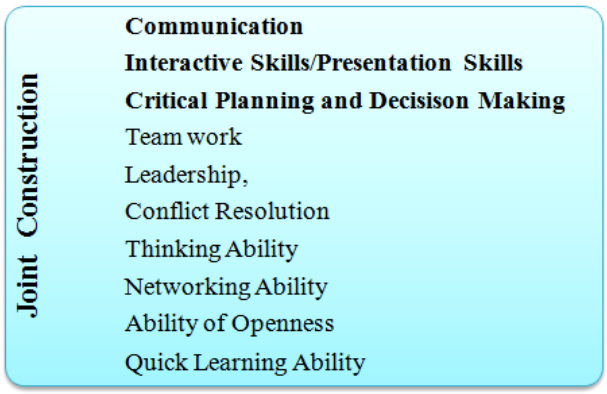


Figure-2: Dimensions of soft skills

Communication skill with confidence is important for upholding organization image by attracting, involving and retaining the audience in respective workforce. Strong communication skill helps to build up advisory relationship. Presentation skills with interactive capability help to promote a person into a better position. One respondent pointed that, "I'm in a better position because of my interactive skill". Another respondent argued that "presentation ability is needed for running my business". One respondent said "If I'm not tidy enough I can lose my customers".

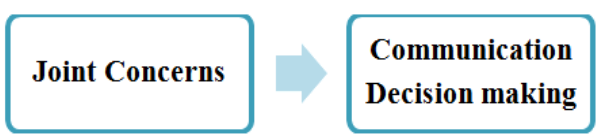
Critical planning needed to survive in the market. It helps to take bold decision that accounts for success in the market growth. One respondent said, decision making ability helps to make important documents. One respondent gave opinion that "offering product, making decision by adopting with the season is also important to survive in this market".

Team working ability stands for career success. One respondent said "I believe in teamwork… what I told to my team they listen…"

Leadership skills help to prove trustworthiness. Leading skills helps to build up advisory capability through commanding ability. It later facilitates in team work. Further, tricky conflict resolution techniques help to solve many problems. Thinking ability helps in making positive environment. One respondent surely stated that, "critical thinking ability needed to survive in the market" another said that, 'thinking ability helps in making important documents of the organization'. Networking ability helps to make friends and maintaining circle. However, Soft skills (ability of openness) make a person to be more extroverts that helps in generating new idea. A respondent said that, "I have the ability of openness; I can search new idea and share with my subordinate". Quick learning ability is also a needed ability. A respondent is found enough confident about this ability and argued that it helps to build flexible nature in career. The researchers now can conclude with the statement that Soft skills are as important as cognitive skills (John, 2009; Zehr, 1998).

5.3. Concerns

Soft skills are responsible for shaping the career. But sometime it cause concerns also. All the respondents express some concern about their soft skills.



5.3.1. Communication: Inappropriate communication skills sometimes create discomfort in the workplace. Friendly communication skills create problems. One respondent said that 'I feel my customers are very comfortable with me for my communication skill but... It creates problems" also said that, it is sometime responsible for irrelevant conversation and 'losing of profit margin'.

5.3.2. Decision making: Quick decision taking ability sometime creates problems. Bold decision making ability creates concern about negative consequences.

5.4. Issues for further concern

All of the respondents gave their claims and concerns positively on soft skills. One previous study also found that 75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% is dependent on technical knowledge (Klaus, 2010). However, acquiring only the soft skills criteria may not be the only aspect to be concerned about as hard skills are fundamental. The respondent of the study reveals the following facts that also consider the complimentary features of both hard and soft skills. For shaping the career only soft skills is not enough. One respondent clearly mention that 'soft skills needed beside hard skills'. An individual with soft skills is not stand enough for career progression. Another respondent emphasizes on the companies rules regarding career progression. Besides soft skills, company policy, protocol results in ultimate decision regarding career progression. The survey carried on a definite time frame with a special purpose, up to this third stage some joint claims, concerns and issues have elucidate by which a meaningful findings can be achieved, those that remain, become the core for the next evaluation that can be studied when time, resources and interest permit.

6. Recommendation and Conclusions

Soft skills and career success surely a burning topic in this globalized market. As unemployment rate of Bangladesh is still high not only for the unskilled but also for the skilled employee. There noticed huge mass of qualified job seekers existing in the society and the competition. Job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming tougher. There is no choice but worth to add their soft skills with hard skills to sustain in the competition. It can be clear from the above discussion that Soft Skills (Professional Skills) complement Hard Skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and thus career prospects. The study has considered in depth the definition and nature of soft skills, dimensions of soft skills in four different perspective including marketing, HR, teaching and entrepreneurship. The study tries to reveal the flavor of soft skills in the dices of constructive research paradigm which ultimately represent vast array of the different workforce. It has been clear from the outset that the concept of the soft skills is not smooth for all the sectors. But to succeed in the professional life one should consider the fact that there is no alternative of soft skills in this competitive era consisting with personalities, attributes, qualities and personal behavior of individual that varies from person to person. The replication of the research would be possible with comparatively large sample size. To make competent our next generation soft skills education program can be introduced by applying appropriate framework. Our education system should adopt such culture that soft skills can get preferences or at least can be introduced from the primary level. Training program by both governmental and nongovernmental can play a vital role to enable people for upgrading their skills.

One of the major strengths of constructivism is the rapport. The rapport depends on the inquirer and interviewee during the process of data collection (Mutepa, 2016). With the principles of constructivism, the rapport requires them to be authentic with one another. In this constructivist study every participants were invited to participate in the analysis and interpretation stages. Because every respondent were entitled to give their opinion, then fairness is the extent to which different constructions and their underlying value structures are requested and honored within the inquiry process (Guba & Lincoln , 1985). Each participant's inputs were presented, clarified and checked and taken into account in a balanced and evenhanded way. Different constructions,

perspectives and positions are not only allowed to emerge but are also seriously considered for merit and worth for maintaining the fairness of the research.

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