INTEGRATION OF LIFE SKILLS TO PREPARE EXELENCE GRADUATES

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Abstract

Soft skills have strategic roles in determining someone's success in his works. Many research show that soft skills (honesty, ethic work, responsibility, discipline as well as safety and work health principles) contributes to an individual's success in their work. Integration between hard skills and soft skills in preparing employees should be done vigorously in many areas, including in formal education. Education world should prepare its graduates not only to be ready for work but also to get successful career wherever they work. There are three strategies to integrate hard skills and soft skills. The strategies include: (1) integration of soft skills and hard skills in curriculum planning, (2) integration of soft skills and hard skills in the teaching learning process, and (3) integration of soft skills and hard skills in organizational or academic culture. This paradigm is relevant with 21st Century Student Outcomes and Support System.

Keywords: *soft skills, hard skills, teaching and learning*

Background

The new paradigm in the 21st educational process drives universities to be responsible to improve graduates' qualities including how to get jobs after they graduate. Universities not only supply employees but also initiate the production of graduates that are needed by society and work fields. Therefore, universities should make an appropriate evaluation towards its graduates in order to get the feedback of the learning programs.

In the quality aspect of *program holders,* the question that needs answer is how big the suitability of competences given by universities with what the work field needs. The smaller the gap of competences given by universities to what is needed by the working world, the better the quality of the program in universities is. The term of competences includes an articulation of hard skills and soft skills, but in the application (the teaching and learning process) these aspects are not integrated. The integration of hard skills and soft skills are important to prepare excellent graduates.

Analysis

Soft skills are the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees (www.wikipedia.com). Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job. In general, the term soft skills are used to describe on-the-job abilities that go beyond an employee's job description. For example, an engineer's ability to create and read blueprints would generally be described as a hard skill, whereas his or her ability to work effectively with co-workers, communicate with clients and manage projects would be lumped together under the soft skills banner (Berman, 2007).

Hard skills refer to specific skills that are used on specific jobs. For example, being able to back a semi-trailer up to a loading dock without hitting anything or anybody is a hard skill that is necessary to be a truck driver. Reporting to work on time, being able to take direction, and having enough initiative to be productive are soft skills. Most employers prefer to hire polite people that can express themselves, and have an optimistic, friendly attitude (http://www.breitlinks.com/careers/soft_skills.htm). Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job. Employers want employees that have both soft and hard skills.

The Workforce Profile (http://www.rediff.com) defined about 60 "soft skills", which employers seek. They are applicable to any field of work, according to the study, and are the "personal traits and skills that employers state are the most important when selecting employees for jobs of any type."

1. Math.
2. Safety.
3. Courtesy.
4. Honesty.
5. Grammar.
6. Reliability.
7. Flexibility.
8. Team skills.
9. Eye contact.
10. Cooperation.
11. Adaptability.
12. Follow rules.
13. Self-directed.
14. Good attitude.
15. Writing skills.
16. Driver's license.
29. Interpersonal skills.
30. Motivational skills.
31. Valuing education.
32. Personal chemistry.
33. Willingness to learn.
34. Common sense.
35. Critical thinking skills.
36. Knowledge of fractions.
37. Reporting to work on time.
38. Use of rulers and calculators.
39. Good personal

48. Awareness of how business works.
49. Staying on the job until it is finished.
50. Ability to read and follow instructions.
51. Willingness to work second and third shifts.
52. Caring about seeing the company succeed.
53. Understanding what the world is all about.
54. Ability to listen and document what you have heard.
55. Commitment to

17. Dependability.
18. Advanced math.
19. Self-supervising.
20. Good references.
21. Being drug free.
22. Good attendance.
23. Personal energy.
24. Work experience.
25. Ability to measure
26. Personal integrity.
27. Good work history.
28. Positive work ethic.
appearance.
40. Wanting to do a good job.
41. Basic spelling and grammar.
42. Reading and comprehension.
43. Ability to follow regulations.
44. Willingness to be accountable.
45. Ability to fill out a job application.
46. Ability to make production quotas.
47. Basic manufacturing skills training.
continued training and learning.
56. Willingness to take instruction and responsibility.
57. Ability to relate to coworkers in a close environment.
58. Not expecting to become a supervisor in the first six months.
59. Willingness to be a good worker and go beyond the traditional eight-hour day.
60. Communication skills with public, fellow employees, supervisors, and customers.

The 60 soft skills mentioned can be classified into corporate skills, employability skills and life skills (Phani, 2007). In some parts of the world like in the USA and Australia, soft skills are also known as world skills. Corporate skills are generally CEO level skills, including: political sensitivity, business and commercial awareness, strategic awareness, understanding funding streams and mechanisms, information management, organization and control, team building, communication and persuasion, networking and public relations, and eading change. Employability skills have to be mastered by employable graduates and fresher include communication, team working, leadership, initiative, problem solving, flexibility and enthusiasm. Life skills are related to the head, heart, hands and health, i.e., highly personal and behavioral skills which reflect our personality and naturally help in personality development.

Soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in the age of information and knowledge. Good soft skills -- which are in fact scarce -- in the highly competitive corporate world, will help someone stand out in a milieu of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent. The Smyth County Industry Council, a governing body based in the US, conducted a survey recently. The results of the survey were called the Workforce Profile which found "an across-the-board unanimous profile of skills

and characteristics needed to make a good employee." The people most likely to be hired for available jobs have what employers call soft skills.

Much research shows that soft skills have a contribution to the success of individuals in their work. My research (Wagiran, 2008), showed that honesty, work ethics, responsibility, discipline and the application of safety and work health principles' aspect are main aspects needed when work on industry. Other aspects also are important but in different level of necessity.

Viewed from the aspects of competence, that are hard and soft skills, it seems that a gap on the soft skills is more dominant than that on the hard skill. Because of that, the development of balance between hard skills and soft skills in line with education roles as an effort to give knowledge, skills and values, and thus it can form an individual's self esteem. Individual self esteem includes individual competences which is represented by five things, they are: motivation, traits, self concept, knowledge, and skills (Wood, et.al., 2001:97; in Ghozali, 2004).

Another studies also stated the importance of soft skills in determining an achievement of an individuals. Those studies are: (1) Harvard University, stating that an individual's achievement on career is 80% determined by soft skills and only 20% determined by hard skills; (2) the book entitled *Lesson from the Top* by Neff and Citrin (1999), stating that out of the ten-successful tips of the 50 most successful persons in the United State of America, eight criteria contain soft skills and only two criteria of hard skills; (3) Survey from *National Association of College and Employee (NA CE),* USA (2002), stating that to 457 leaders in USA, about 20 important qualities of successful people, the result showed that 18 of them are soft skills and only two on hard skills; (4) Putri (Vibiznews-Human Resources) stated that: "communication and interpersonal skill are the most important guarantee to success in any professions" (www.frieyadie.com.html).

In a survey by technology recruiters Robert Half (www.roberthalftechnology .com), they poled 1,400 CIOs. CIOs were asked, *"In which of the following areas do you think your IT staff could most use improvement?"*

- Technical abilities 25%
- Project management skills 23%
- Verbal and written communication abilities 15%
- Organizational skills 14%
- Interpersonal skills... 12%
- None/no improvements needed 3%
- Other/don't know.. 8%

While "technical abilities" were ranked first as a single classification, the combination of verbal and written abilities, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills are shown. In other words, those abilities that are typically thought of as *"soft skills," account for 41%* of the areas that need improvement.

The latest research by Kay (2008), show that: knowledge and skills needed in the working of world are: oral communication (80 %), collaboration (94, 4 %), professional/work ethics (93, 8 %), written communication (93, 1 %), and critical thinking/problem solving (93, 1%). Urgently skills in future are: critical thinking (78 %), I.T. (77 %), health & wellness (76 %), collaboration (74 %), innovation (74 %), and personal financial responsibility (72 %).

Accumulation from studies made the education world prepares its graduates not only ready for work but also ready to get successful career wherever they work. Moreover, for Human Resources practitioners, hard skill approach has already left. It is meaningless if students are good in hard skills, but bad in soft skills. It can be viewed from the requirements in job vacancy advertisements that they require soft skills such as team work, communication skills and interpersonal relationship. When hiring new employees, companies prefer to choose those who have high soft skills although their hard skills are lower. The reasons are simple: giving skill training is easier than developing characters. It is common in recruiting employment strategy that to create the Right People-Right Job-Right Performance, human resources practitioners frequently do screening recruitment with "a Recruit for Attitude, Train for Skill" principle.

Various research above shows that soft skills have strategic roles in determining an individual's success in his/her works. Therefore, integration between hard skills and soft skills in preparing employees with various efforts including in formal education should be done. On the contrary, many of education institutions still did not realize that. A research done by Business-Higher Education and The Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University (www.dbcc.cc.fl.us.htm) showed responses from managers which stated that students have technique skills but low in "soft skill." Students do not think about preparing for the job market as they enter colleges. They think that the training in résumé writing and interviewing during the spring of their senior years are all that is needed to land a job.

Students tend to think a high GPA and a degree will guarantee career success, but anyone in the work world knows that only skills and character ensure success. The GPA provides s employers with one indication that the student can work hard and manage time well. Students graduating with 3.0 will pass the grade cut-off for most jobs. Some employers want to see a 3.55, but not most. A few even become suspicious when GPA gets beyond the 3.6 range. A corporate recruiter sent me this note:" Our cutoff is 3.0 a 3.2 is really looked at no differently from 3.7.

The failure to develop professional skills is not only the fault of the students. Unfocused, complex and confusing undergraduate programs share the blame. College curricula are mostly intended to teach knowledge. Unfortunately, "knowledge" is raw data and scholarly opinion, which are often dated and irrelevant. Even without these flaws, accumulating knowledge does not promote a successful career any more than overdosing on vitamins leads to good health.

Soft skill investment to students is important aspect in creating graduates which can compete and succeed on their jobs. In conclusions, the integration pattern studies between hard skills and soft skills are needed in the learning process with various strategies. There are three strategies to integrate hard skills and soft skills. The strategies include: (1) integration of soft skills and hard skills in curriculum planning, (2) integration of soft kills and hard skills in teaching learning process, and (3) integration of soft skills and hard skills in academic culture (see Wagiran, 2009). This paradigm is relevant with the 21st Century Student Outcomes and Support System (Partnership for 21st century Skills, 2009) like Fig. 1 below:
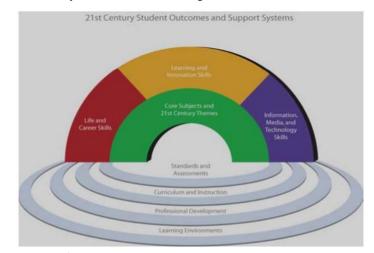

Fig. 1 21st Century Student Outcomes and Support System

From Fig. 1, skills needed in the work fields are the integration from three aspects: (1) learning and innovation skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking

and problem solving, communication and collaboration); (2) information, media, and technological skills; and (3) life and career skills (flexible and adaptive, initiative and self-directed, social ability and cross culture, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility). The integration of soft skills in one of three models can be an effective strategy to prepare excellent graduates.

Conclusion and Implication

Soft skills have strategic roles in determining an individual's success in his works, but many of education institutions still did not realize that. The integration between hard skills and soft skills in preparing employees with various efforts including in formal education should be done. There are three strategies to integrate the hard skills and soft skills. The strategies included: (1) integration of soft skills and hard skills in curriculum planning, (2) integration of soft kills and hard skills in teaching learning process, and (3) integration of soft skills and hard skills in the organizational or academic culture.

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