Chapter Seven

Strategy and Recommendations
Chapter Seven - Strategy And Recommendations

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents the strategy and recommendations chalked out after analysing the findings and presents suggestions for conduct of training programmes.

The study was set out with the objective of exploring the relationship between soft skills training programmes and performance based on factors such as age, educational background and educational faculty. The idea was also to find soft skills training programmes bring about change in attitude and help to build relationships.

The results were derived by studying the above aspects with respect to the training programmes which were selected for the current study under the umbrella of soft skills.

7.1. Strategy

The strategy for implementation of training has been tabulated as follows:

Table 7.1(A) - Summary of Findings with Suggested Implementation Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Programme</th>
<th>Age - GroupWise Perceptions of Importance and Usefulness Across Groups</th>
<th>Educational Backgroundwise Perceptions of Importance and Usefulness Across Groups</th>
<th>Educational Facultywise Perceptions of Importance and Usefulness Across Groups</th>
<th>Strategy for Implementation of Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Training - Verbal</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all educational background</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented across educational faculty groups but to be made relevant and useful by considering each groups needs of each educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Training - Non-Verbal</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented across all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Training - Written</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills Training</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Not Important for all educational backgrounds but useful for all educational backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness Training</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-working Skills Training</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving Skills Training</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management Training</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Skills Training</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Not Important for all educational backgrounds but useful for all educational backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all educational faculty groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Etiquette Training</td>
<td>Not important and Not Useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Not Important for all educational backgrounds and Not Useful for all educational backgrounds</td>
<td>Not important for technical skills and not useful for all educational faculty groups</td>
<td>To understand the reasons for variations in perceptions of importance and utility across educational faculty groups and drive home the importance by making training relevant to all age-groups as it is the basis for all soft skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management Training</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Not important for educational backgrounds but Useful for all educational backgrounds</td>
<td>Not important for all technical skills groups and useful for all technical skills</td>
<td>To understand the nuances of different aspects of time management for different technical groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Skills Training</td>
<td>Important but not useful for all age-groups</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all Educational Backgrounds</td>
<td>Important and Useful for all technical groups</td>
<td>To be implemented for all technical backgrounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2. Strategic Insights for Different Training Programmes

The results of the analysis have given some insights into the strategies which can be adopted to make the soft skills training programmes more effective and can bring about optimum performance. These are suggested below:

7.2.1 Verbal Communication Skills Training

Verbal communication skills training should be focus on enabling employability through the ability to articulate while reporting to seniors and increase their potential for higher responsibilities. English language should be a focal point in verbal communication skills training.

At higher age-groups, verbal communication skills training should enable managers to handle performance related communication such as appraisals, reviews and feedback and should enable strategic articulation in high-stake conversations.

Verbal ability is a mark of leadership. The training, if delivered as a part of leadership skills training, Training in verbal communication skills therefore should focus on enabling authentic communication with a focus on credibility and integrity.

The art of speaking well is more important in all domains and also overrides the expertise in their educational background and faculties. Verbal communication skills training programmes must be based on specific communication requirements of specific domains and should also focus on including domain related jargon and terminologies while designing training content.

7.2.2. Non-Verbal Communication Skills Training

Long term employability is a matter of concern for both younger as well as older workers can be made the central point to drive home the determination of benefits from non-verbal communication skills training.

Non-verbal communication skills have become the focal points and are equated to domain skills in the hospitality and aviation sector. These need to be upgraded frequently. Trainers should design training interventions by using adult and experiential learning methods to help older workers derive utmost benefit from the training.

Different nuances of non-verbal communication means differently to different age-groups. Their learning styles also change as they grow older. Unless older employees feel that their productivity and performance is being hampered by their lack of proper non verbal communication skill and by using the wrong body language, they tend to give the wrong signals, they may not befit from the training. Trainers have to remove learning blockages of
the older workers and help older workers to focus on unmasking and undoing years of ingrained communication patterns and styles.

Non-verbal communication training should focus on creating awareness among all technical domains and educational faculties on how expressive a person’s body and voice are in communicating their real feelings with or without their knowledge.

7.2.3. Written Communication Skills Training

At a younger age-group, written communication skills training should focus on the formal art of report writing and projecting a professional image through all writing platforms.

Written communication skills training should be conducted more often to improve the written content that goes out of the organisation. This finding also quells myths that writing should be restricted to softer areas and that it is not required in tougher domains.

Training in written communication skills therefore has to be designed to suit the written communication requirements of each organization and workplace in which the managers are situated and the training has to focus on enabling each training participant to adapt and customize his writing style to the organizational requirements and at the same time distinguish himself with his writing stamp.

The stylistic element plays a vital role in written communication skills training. Every organization has certain norms and etiquette with regard to the writing that happens within the organization. At the same time, a training expert in business writing has to remember that certain aspects of written communication like format, punctuation, grammatical accuracy and tone are sacrosanct and have to be universally included in all written communication training. Training in written communication skills therefore has to be designed to suit the written communication requirements of each organization and workplace in which the managers are situated and the training has to focus on enabling each training participant to adapt and customize his writing style to the organizational requirements and at the same time distinguish himself with his writing stamp.

7.2.4. Self-Awareness Training

Self-awareness training has been significantly showing as important and useful across groups because of the very nature of the training intervention. Self-awareness training should be implanted across all age-groups, educational backgrounds and education faculty groups.

7.2.5. Leadership Skills Training

Leadership skills training is considered useful across all educational domains ascertain both the importance and utility of leadership in all technical domains and calls for conducting more
leadership training in all technical domains however the training design has to include the different nuances of leadership required of the various technical and educational faculty domains.

7.2.6. Assertive Skills Training

In order to establish assertive skills training in the Indian context, the importance and usefulness of assertive skills training has to be driven home through constant communication of the need for assertiveness as a tool for performance.

Assertive skills training should be conducted over a longer duration as it requires unravelling and rectification of long ingrained behavioural patterns of submission or aggression which may be difficult in a training of one or two days. For effective transfer of training in assertive skills training, organisations should invite expert facilitators, increase the duration of training and provide adequate time for trainees to demonstrate the learned skills at the workplace based on their comfort level.

7.2.7. Problem-Solving Skills Training

Problems Solving Skills Training should aim at the use of the cognitive approach should be include among the most required training programmes

7.2.8. Team-working Skills Training

The design and content of team working skills training programmes should be probed to check whether they are tailored to meet the development requirements of specific teams to which they are delivered.

Team working training requires the trainer to be highly sensitive of the psyche of each participant, his team skills and his personal barriers that keep him for being a team person. Facilitation and debriefing is a critical aspect of team working skills training which trainers tend to ignore.

The process-approach to team training mandates the facilitator to have special skills which would in turn help him to help participants discover, analyse and interpret their behaviour during team exercises so that they can work on realigning their skills discoveries to develop higher team working potential. Insensitive handling and debriefing can break a team members’ morale and can seriously hamper transfer of learning making the training programme a disaster.

7.2.9. Conflict Management Training

Conflict management training needs to be blended with leadership training or should be included as a part of leadership training because managers perceive conflict resolution and
having a better understanding of as a part of leadership competence inclusion of assertive communication skills in a conflict management training

Conflict management training should be customised to different educational faculties, to include typical and specific conflict patterns in respective areas and also to design assertive skills programmes to help more people from educational faculties to manage conflict within their domains.

7.2.10. Time Management Training

Specific requirements of time management training should be researched, as lack of time management is sometimes interpreted as a requirement for stress management training or etiquette training. Trainers should also study actual work conditions of younger and older workers to understand the requirements of different generations to make the training more useful for each age-group and educational background and faculty.

7.2.11. Presentation Skills Training

Training requirement of senior and older managers in presentation skills should be probed further because the types of presentations made at different age-groups vary with the level of seniority.

Presentation skills training for educational faculties should focus on enabling managers of different domain groups to understand important aspects of presentation skills such as posture, non-verbal communication, voice and tone, appearance and image enhancement and design the training programmes accordingly.

7.2.12. Business Etiquette Training

The results of the findings show that there is a relationship between educational faculty and the perceptions of importance of Business Etiquette Training & Time Management Training.

The finding makes a strong case for developing more awareness of the content of business etiquette training programmes in all educational faculty groups.

The design and methodology of business etiquette training should be examined and customised for relevance and participation. The results of the findings show that there is a relationship between educational faculty and the perceptions of importance of Business Etiquette Training & Time Management Training.

There is a strong case for developing more awareness of the content and culture related aspects of business etiquette training programmes in all educational faculty groups. Business etiquette
is culture associated training programmes and training in etiquette needs to be viewed from the cultural angle.

The current study shows that there is a significant relationship between age and the perceptions towards importance of soft skills’ training in business etiquette training. The difference in the perception of the importance of business etiquette within age-groups could be attributed to varied experiences with business etiquette training. Business Etiquette training should be customised to make it seem worthy of importance for all age-groups.

7.3. Suggested Measures To Bring Change in Attitude, Outlook and Behaviour Modification Through Soft skills Training

The biggest challenge for organizations is to build a population with a global outlook which has the potential to work in a multi-cultural environment. To do this, large business corporations are also building partnerships with institutions to help the future workforce learn the soft skills required to bring in a changed outlook. Soft skills training content such as communication skills, teamwork and interpersonal skills scale up along with cultural awareness based on age. It is easier to help a younger workforce bring in a changed outlook however, the question of whether a workforce in the senior age –groups would be able to use the learnings to change and help them to reinvent their career graph or even to go in a for self-transformation would be a challenge for business corporations.

Organisations looking for change in outlook through soft skills training should keep the age factor in mind while designing content for soft skills training programme

Training Programme in self-awareness, conflict management, team management, business etiquette and assertive skills may be recommended to change attitude and modify behaviour

Those who perform tend to manifest certain types of behaviour that can be determined as performance related behaviour. It is very critical to find whether training in soft skills of any kind helps to modify or change the behaviour of those who are trained and whether this changed behaviour can culminate into performance. This may be specially done for the service industry, aviation and hospitality where behaviour modification is required to bring about performance. Certain professions require demonstrations of specific behaviour. It is important to question the difference in perceptions about the role of certain soft skills training programmes in bringing about a change in attitude which is also a manifestation of changed behaviour.

Organisations building these training programmes should consider the age aspect of those being trained. It is easier to help a younger workforce bring in a changed outlook however, the question of whether a workforce in the senior age –groups would be able to use the learnings to change and help them to reinvent their career graph or even to go in a for self-transformation would be a challenge for business corporations.
### Table 7.1(B)- Training Programmes in Soft Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOST EFFECTIVE TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN SOFT SKILLS</th>
<th>ACTION TO BE TAKEN FOR HIGHER IMPACT</th>
<th>DURATION OF TRAINING</th>
<th>METHODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Training-Written</td>
<td>Proper Study of workplace requirements of written communication; examples to be taken from relevant workplace situations; to include extensive written exercises</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Exercises &amp; case discussion, conceptual discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem- Solving Skills Training</td>
<td>Exercise such as Six Thinking Hats should be used for simulation</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities, exercises &amp; case discussion, structured thinking and lateral thinking exercises, Simulation exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management Training</td>
<td>For additional impact, to be clubbed with assertive skills and non-verbal communication</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities, exercises &amp; case discussion, role-play, film review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR ALL AGE-GROUPS

| Communication Skills- Verbal                        | For higher impact, to include more listening skills exercises, language proficiency exercises should be introduced for grammatical accuracy | Two days             | Activities, exercises & case discussion, practice sessions through role-play and audio visual exercises |
| Communication Skills- Written                       | Exercises should be selected from communication patterns used by particular age-groups | Two days             | Exercises & case discussion, conceptual discussion |
| Self-Awareness Training                             | To draw upon models of emotional maturity, such as Daniel Goldman's model, Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences | Two days             | Exercises, self-awareness inventories, case discussion, role-play and discussion |
| Problem Solving Skills Training                     | Exercise such as Six Thinking Hats should be used for simulation. To be made relevant to particular age-groups | Two days             | Activities, exercises & case discussion, structured thinking and lateral thinking |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Programme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict Management Training</strong></td>
<td>For additional impact, to be clubbed with assertive skills and non-verbal communication. To be made relevant to particular age groups</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities, exercises &amp; case discussion, role-play, film review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Verbal Communication Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>For additional impact, to be embedded in other soft skills training modules such as Business Etiquette, conflict management and assertive skills.</td>
<td>One day</td>
<td>Role-play, movie review, exercises and brainstorming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>To check requirement of leadership competencies for particular backgrounds and connotations of leadership in particular profiles</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Exercises and activities followed by conceptual discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team-working Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>To include optimum facilitation and outbound movement followed by rigorous debriefing Can be followed by self-awareness sessions</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities and exercises, outbound and simulated exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Management Training</strong></td>
<td>To be made specific and applicable to workplace situations as each person's time management issues are different and vary with the workplace</td>
<td>One day</td>
<td>Time-log and goal setting exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>Make more useful</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Rigorous exercises with video shooting and feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR ALL EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Programme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Verbal Communication Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>For additional impact, to be embedded in other soft skills training modules such as Business Etiquette, conflict management and assertive skills.</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Role-play, movie review, exercises and brainstorming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team-working Skills Training</strong></td>
<td>To include optimum facilitation and outbound movement followed by rigorous debriefing Can be followed by self-awareness sessions</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities and exercises, outbound and simulated exercises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Problem Solving Skills Training
- Exercise such as Six Thinking Hats should be used for simulation
- Two days
- Activities, exercises & case discussion, structured thinking and lateral thinking exercises

## Conflict Management Training
- For additional impact, to be clubbed with assertive skills and non-verbal communication
- Two days
- Activities, exercises & case discussion, role-play, film review

## Communication Skills - Written
- Proper Study of workplace requirements of written communication; examples to be taken from relevant workplace situations; to include extensive written exercises
- Two days
- Exercises & case discussion, conceptual discussion

## Communications Skills – Verbal
- Make more useful
- Two days
- Activities, exercises & case discussion, practice sessions through role-play and audio visual exercises

## TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR ALL EDUCATIONAL FACULTY GROUPS

### Communication Skills Training - Non-Verbal
- For additional impact, to be embedded in other soft skills training modules such as Business Etiquette, conflict management and assertive skills.
- Two days
- Role-play, movie review, exercises and brainstorming

### Communication Skills Training - Written
- Proper Study of workplace requirements of written communication; examples to be taken from relevant workplace situations; to include extensive written exercises
- Two days
- Exercises & case discussion, conceptual discussion

### Leadership Skills Training
- To check requirement of leadership competencies for particular backgrounds and connotations of leadership in particular profiles
- Two days
- Exercises and activities followed by conceptual discussion

### Self-Awareness Training
- To draw upon models of emotional maturity, such as Daniel Goldman’s model, Howard
- Two days
- Exercises, self-awareness inventories, case discussion, role-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teamworking Skills Training</th>
<th>Gardner's multiple intelligences</th>
<th>Two days</th>
<th>Activities and exercises-outbound and simulated exercises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skills Training</td>
<td>To include optimum facilitation and outbound movement followed by rigorous debriefing Can be followed by self-awareness sessions</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities, exercises &amp; case discussion, structured thinking and lateral thinking exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management Training</td>
<td>Exercise such as Six Thinking Hats should be used for simulation</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Activities, exercises &amp; case discussion, role-play, film review, conflict management situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Skills Training</td>
<td>Exercises should be selected from communication patterns used by particular age-groups</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Exercises, assertiveness awareness inventories, role-play and personal, lab discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Skills Training</td>
<td>To adopt self-introspection and self-awareness as a basis for training. Training to be done with high sensitivity and give time to trainee to transfer to real-life situations</td>
<td>Three days spread out over two weeks</td>
<td>Rigorous exercises with video shooting and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Training- Non-Verbal</td>
<td>For additional impact, to be embedded in other soft skills training modules such as Business Etiquette, conflict management and assertive skills.</td>
<td>Two days</td>
<td>Role-play, movie review, exercises and brainstorming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.4. Suggested Levels Of Training To Improve Effectiveness, Rigour Of Training And Certification

Usefulness of training may be taken into account the rigour of training in terms of the outcome and in terms of the rigour applied for assessing and certification of the candidates trained. Organizations which implement customized company specific modules for training for technical training applies high standards of certification, insisting on a 10 on 10 and not even a 9 on 10. This is because precision and perfection is part of their brand.
In a verbal communication skills training programme it is extremely important for the trainer to understand that the trained employee represents the brand of the organization for which he is speaking up, be it through a telephone conversation, or a sales presentation or an international meeting where he represents the organization. The communication skills of the representing manager speak up for the quality of the communication skills of the entire organization. Assessment and training of soft skills training therefore has to adopt the same rigour and precision that a technical training has. It also cannot be ignored that communication of technical competence is also an important aspect. Therefore, even a technical training would have to include soft skills within the training. The assessment of soft skills blended within a technical module would also require rigorous certification standards so as to represent the brand of the organization.

The following flowchart can be recommended as a comprehensive development intervention in soft skills training.

**Figure- 7.1A : FLOW CHART FOR SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRAINING**

Based on the findings and recommendations, the following model has been suggested for conduct of soft skill training programmes.
7.5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendation can be made.

7.5.1. Recommendations for training professionals- Training managers and soft skills’ training experts can focus and concentrate on developing content for training programmes where there is no variation in perceptions of importance and usefulness across age-groups, educational backgrounds and technical streams, which are written communication skills, problem solving, conflict management. There is also a strong need for training professionals to be able to develop the right communication skills and develop facilitation skills (Akpinar, K.D, 2009).

Training programmes where there is no relationship between age, educational background and educational faculty and perceptions of importance are the training programmes are verbal communication skills, non-verbal communication skills training, problem solving skills, team-working skills training, conflict management training and written communications skills training. There is a need to find ways to make these training
programmes more useful by introducing more work-related instances in the exercises and activities and connecting them to the immediate work situations.

Training programmes where there is no variation in perceptions of usefulness for performance, that is, self-awareness training, problem solving skills training and written communication skills training can be considered as useful and should be conducted more often.

7.5.2. Recommendations for HR professionals

While the gamut and scope of soft skills’ training is vast and includes many areas, from the view of making optimum use of training budgets allocated for behaviour and soft skills' training, soft skills’ training could concentrate on designing training modules which would include programmes that are considered important and useful.

7.5.3. Recommendations for Academic Organisations

Institutions that provide education which help in developing and grooming potential managers to be able to take on corporate responsibilities in the future, should focus on including the above training programmes in their core-curriculum so that they equip their students who wish to enter the corporate world and make a career with industry-ready skills.

7.5.4. Recommendations for Relationship Building through Soft Skills Training

There is a need to study how different age-groups would use the learning from each training programme to manage their existing relationships better, form new networks and establish new bonds to bring about more productivity in their relationships. Trainers and functional superiors should provide a helping hand to help training participants use their meta-cognition to relate the relationship building aspects of the training attended and make the learning transferable to the workplace thus enabling them to build meaningful bonds with people and build healthy workplace relationships. The role of each training should be understood for identification of skills gaps in healthy relationship formation. Training experts should study changing relationship formation patterns of different age-groups and people cope with relationship building at different stages of life.
HR Experts should study how different age-groups would use the learning from each training programme to manage their existing relationships better, form new networks and establish new bonds to bring about more productivity in their relationships. Trainers and functional superiors should also provide a helping hand to help training participants use their metacognition to relate the relationship building aspects of the training attended and make the learning transferable to the workplace. Thus enabling them to build meaningful bonds with people and build healthy workplace relationships. In order to do this it is important to understand the role of each training intervention and also very important to understand which aspect of their skills gaps is hampering healthy relationship formation. It is also necessary for training experts to study changing relationship formation patterns of different age-groups and people cope with relationship building at different stages of life.

7.5.5. Recommendations for learning transfer and bringing about attitudinal change as a result of Soft skills’ training

Exercises and activities could be used more often in the design and delivery of the core soft skills’ training programmes, which would ensure effective learning transfer. Organisations should also allow for gradual change in behaviour and attitude by understanding that learning transfer differs from person to person. Organisations should also develop an intrinsic motivation among the employees to attend training programmes and use them at the workplace. This is whetted by the finding that participants would be willing to transfer the learning from their soft skills programmes if their boss support them in bringing about the transfer. Dharmarajan, Pachigalla & Lanka (2012) in their research paper “The Significance of Including Soft Skills in the Process of Teaching Hard Skills’ pin the responsibility of conveying the importance of learning soft skills in domain courses on the teachers and to some extent on the parents, because as per the researchers, soft skills such as etiquette are mainly learnt by students in their teens and in their early formative years. The article also mentions how the teacher should identify with the soft skill, especially etiquette training.

7.5.6. Recommendations For Training Programmes
While the findings show that soft skills training programmes have a positive impact on performance, there should be a provision for gradual change in behaviour which is preceded by awareness which gets heightened in the course of time with due follow-up. Training programmes in soft skills should be conducted more often without expecting immediate ROI. It is also required examine training programmes in business etiquette. Training programmes in business etiquette are in the formative stage and tend to follow a ‘tell’-style of training. Relevance in business etiquette training is also not felt unless a trainee feels that he or she is losing out on some critical take-away from the workplace, such as a promotion or a coveted international assignment due to lack of proper business etiquette and lack of self-presentation. The domain of business etiquette training is also in a nascent stage and is yet to develop and establish itself as an independent learning domain. The concept of image-management, which is an offshoot of business etiquette, is very nascent and needs to stand the test of time till it get a status as an essential training that can be likened or equated with other soft skills’ training programmes such as verbal communication skills and so on. Business etiquette training is closely associated with intercultural learning and training as the content deals with understanding cultural concepts before understanding the relevance of using set ways and norms of behaviour, which are advocated in business etiquette training. Business etiquette training also involves different platforms such as computer based learning which includes CD/DVD’s film, etc. The relevance and importance of business etiquette therefore becomes critical for a population which requires intermingling with different cultures and nationalities. The learning domain in cross-cultural communication training depends on conceptual information available in web-based business etiquette articles (Intercultural Communication-Theoretical Framework and Training Methods- Angela Maria Larrea Espinar, 2010). More often, business etiquette also gets included in business communication training. Business Etiquette training also becomes more effective if the learning is related to specific personality and social barriers which particular trainees face in personal life and at work. Relevance of certain such as need for learning wine etiquette is misinterpreted by participants. However there is a relevance of wine etiquette training to people who do not socialize much, lest they fall into unanticipated social situations.

Based on the validations of the recommendations through the pre and post training analysis, it is recommended that methodology and training content for written communication skills
training should be minutely examined to bring about relevance to the workplace. Training duration for written communication should be increased and the rigour of training should be increased. Training material should also be made more contemporary at the same time should include more attractive content to help participants engage in the training.

Similarly, it may also be noted that training in assertive skills is also frequently clubbed with the domain of verbal communication skills, because in many cases, communication skills training most often advocates communicating assertively. Assertive skills training helps people become more receptive and thus communicate well (Anant.H.S, 2009). As a result, assertive skills’ training gets covered in communication skills training. Assertive skills training also has to find an establishment in the Indian scenario and the reasons for there to be a difference in perceptions of its importance could be attributed to a lack of understanding of what assertiveness means exactly. It is also important to understand how people communicate and manage expectations of communication (O’Rourke, 2004) Chaturvedi, Yadav & Bajpai (2011) in their research paper, Communicative Approach to Hard and Soft Skills, list assertiveness as a generic soft skill and list time management as both a generic and managerial skill. Transfer in assertive skills training can also prove problematic in organizations where obedience to superiors is a norm, resulting in groupthink and hindering performance. Assertive skills helps here in helping people to present minority views (Anant.H.S 2009) However, assertive skills definitely get included under adopting a communicative approach.

Studies in behavioural therapy for schizophrenic patients (Kopelowicz, 2006) shows that assertive skills training is also included in social skills training for schizophrenic patients as a way of communicating effectively and developing social and interactive skills for coping in society. Another reason for difference in perceptions about the importance and usefulness of assertive skills training could be attributing to assertiveness being a deeply psychological and sensitive area. Assertiveness cannot be accomplished only through a one-day to two day training programmes because the roots of non-assertive behaviour, be it aggression or passive behaviour- go deep into the childhood recordings and upbringing of the individual, closely connected with psychology. Assertive skills training therefore cannot be easily effective because even if a person understands that he or she needs to be assertive it is very difficult to bring about the change. The design and delivery of an assertive skills training is closely
connected with a behavioural lab, closely connected with self-esteem and self-appreciation and moves closer to the Transactional Analysis and adult ego state. The training therefore is process oriented and the resource person needs to be highly sensitive and an expert.

The findings from the study also lead way to further studies in the area of teaching vs. learning and training vs. learning, with cope to conduct further research between transactional analysis and the ego states with learning and development. While the term training adopts the ‘tell’ approach, and the ‘you don’t know, but I do’ approach, which is similar to ‘I’m OK, You’re not OK’, the focus in organizational development is fast moving from training to learning, which should adopt the approach of ‘I’m OK, You’re OK’, which would enable both the resource person and the learner to interact on equal platform and co-learn. The findings that exercise and activities are the most preferred learning methods in soft skills, reinforces this viewpoint.

There is scope for creation of a domain for soft skills learning as against soft skills’ training and more training is required in addition to formal and informal support to participants to support the training. (Crosbie, 2005)

Further research is required into business etiquette and assertive skills training to evolve them into serious and independent training domains by looking at new trends in each of these areas.

Further research is also needed into content of training and duration and methodology of training.

Inclusion and involvement of superior’s and organizational support to create a conducive environment for learners to transfer their soft skills learning to the workplace.

7.5.7. Application of Soft Skills Training as an Intervention in improving Business Performance
In a web discussion on Justifying the cost of training created by Rachel Busch, HR professionals defended the cost of training, by saying that in order to prevent organizational budgets from being reduced for training (because it usually happens that whenever expenses have to be cut in a call centre it is usually training which faces the axe), is to stop looking at it as a perk and as a non-productive paid time and stop considering it as an intangible asset. Instead, if each component of the training curriculum is quantified into a performance metric and then tied to a budget, it will have more relevance. For example, they said that investment in a three day programme on ‘telephone etiquette’ must be tied to improved customer service or improved phone handling time by learning to control the call better. Also HR professionals advocate speaking the language of the line managers, by for example saying that an untrained person is expensive for the organization.’ Or by convincing people that that by cutting down on training time, the errors percentage is bound to increase by a certain percentage and by specifying exact cost. This approach also brings in the argument by Stephen King about considering etiquette as a religion and an important ethic as against looking at it as a skill. This calls for attributing deeper meaning to the skills and view it as a serious business requirement.

Soft Skills Training should be implemented irrespective of its intangible nature. Although the measurement aspect of soft skills training may be of a diffuse nature unlike the specific nature of measurement of technical skills training, organisations should view soft skills training as a tool to improve business performance. This finding of the current study is critical and should be heeded by all for organisations as it augers well for those who look for return-on-investment from soft skills training. At all age-groups, soft skills training should be used an intervention to bring about business performance improvement.
7.6. Conclusion

The study shows that there is a perceived link between soft skills’ training programmes and their role in helping to achieve performance. The study also shows that there is a positive impact on the skills of those who have attended training in soft skills training in all the training programme. Soft skills’ training programmes that are perceived and accepted as important and useful by all age groups, educational backgrounds and educational faculty streams should be included as core soft skills’ training programmes by academic and non-academic organisations. Training programmes are considered important when they link directly with work requirements. However, the effectiveness, utility and impact of the training programmes would depend on various other attributes such as the training methods used to impart the training, the skills, and passion of the training resource person, the training content and the design and content of the training programme. Perceptions of importance of training would also depend on the way a programme is presented to a target group- whether it is presented as an independent module (standalone programme) or whether it is embedded and packaged as a session within another programme under a different title. Perceptions of importance of training programmes also depend on the awareness of a target group on the nature of the training intervention and its felt need and relevance at the workplace or in his or her milieu. It also depends on how long the training interventions and concept has been around in the world of training. Perceptions about the importance and usefulness of a training programme could also be a result of the experiences of training participants during the training programmes, which could include experiences with the trainers, the connect the trainer has or has not had with the participants, the passion that the trainer exudes as also the belief and the involvement that the trainer himself has with the subject of the training. Conveying and communicating the importance of a particular training intervention depends not only on the trainer but also on the importance that the organization and people who matter in the organization. The passage between getting ready to attend training programme because of the belief of its importance and usefulness- participating wholeheartedly in the programmes, learning from it and then to be able transfer it to the workplace also requires support from the immediate superior.