Chapter – I

Introduction
1.1 Background of the Study:

The companies like Sun Microsystems, Mastek, Polaris and Infosys have one thing in common i.e. they have all added soft skills in their training agenda. All these companies are aware of the importance and significance attached to soft skills and they emphasize to train and groom their employees so as to improve their productivity and performance. Infosys has come out with a wonderful program known as 'Campus Connect Initiative'. And it provides Special Training Program (STP) for the teaching faculties of professional engineering colleges and trains them on Soft Skills who in turn form a core team of 5 members in their respective colleges for further training. Of course, it is a type of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that aims at bridging the gap between the campus and industry. Infosys addresses the issue from three dimensions such as student, faculty and the institutional level so as to streamline and make the concept a reality.

The professional world of learning has undergone a tremendous change. Gone are those days when the sectors, be it manufacturing or services, used to give special emphasis on technical skill sets. Today the need is for a perfect blend of technical know-how and soft skills that requires all training establishments to adopt these changes to make the perfect recipe for success. All stakeholders related to the grooming of talents - be it management, engineering, medical sciences, architecture have felt the importance of soft skills and therefore started to imbibe the same, both formally and informally. Two decades ago most of the engineering and technical institutes might not have even dreamt about incorporating personality development as one of the subjects for the budding engineers. The tried and tested model, i.e. the blended approach of domain knowledge
along with soft skills has therefore being the prescription of success for all battle hardened employees. By the way let us know what soft skills mean.

1.2 Significance of the study:

The companies like Sun Microsystems, Mastek, Polaris and Infosys have one thing in common i.e. they have all added soft skills in their training agenda. All these companies are aware of the importance and significance attached to soft skills and they emphasize to train and groom their employees so as to improve their productivity and performance. Infosys has come out with a novel program known as 'Campus Connect Initiative'. It provides Special Training Program (STP) for the teaching faculties of professional engineering colleges and trains them in Soft Skills who in turn form a core team of 5 members in their respective colleges for further training. Of course, it is a type of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that aims at bridging the gap between the campus and industry. Infosys addresses the issue of unemployability from three dimensions such as student, faculty and the institutional level.

1.3 Soft Skills:

According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, soft skills are a combination of competencies that contribute to a person's ability to manage his or herself and relate to other people-matters twice as much as IQ or technical skills in job success.

The skills and abilities that are required for passed out students so as to get adjusted at the industrial front that are more specially related to communication skills are known as soft skills. These are known as social skills, people skills and also as emotional intelligence. A few call these as life skills. It is all about anything other than domain knowledge. It is also about interpersonal relations, attitude to develop as an individual and above all about the personal grooming to face challenges in the day-to-day life in the corporate world. Soft skills emphasize on 'how you say?' not 'what you say?'
In the Malaysian context, 'Soft skills' can be said to incorporate all aspects of generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2006). Though there are no specific soft skills, however majority of these skills are associated with positive values, leadership skills, teamwork force, communicative skills and life-long learning. Soft skills are identified to be the most critical skills in the current global job market especially in a fast moved era of technology (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2006). The reorientation of education, which is one trust of education for sustainability, also relates the importance of these so-called 'soft skills'.

With the changing business environment, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is intensifying. To get an edge over others in the competitive market, students are complementing their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. While hard skills are academic skills, knowledge, experience and level of expertise, the soft skills are self-developed, interactive, communication, human and transferable skills.

Research suggests that hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while remaining 85% is contributed by soft skills. To survive in today's globalized environment, most employers focus on employing, retaining and promoting people who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, self-directed, have effective communication, willing to work and learn with positive attitude. Against this backdrop, soft skills have become very important to project the real potential of perspective job seekers. After realizing the importance of this newly raised important aspect, most of the business schools have initiated programs and projects for developing soft skills in their students.

Soft skills have become an important criterion in hiring MBA graduates, which can be best described as an entrepreneurial drive that makes a person stand out from the crowd. These characteristics may not be unique to MBAs but are important to meet
business needs, namely requirement for academic excellence, a good understanding of
general management, proven leadership skills, communication skills and flexibility to
work anywhere. Hiring an MBA becomes almost mandatory in organizations irrespective
of their business environment; and for the organization to succeed, it needs a person with
all the aforesaid attributes.

In a recent survey, UK-based Class Business School found that most employers
consider the analytical and problem-solving skills and most importantly soft skills while
recruiting MBAs. The survey reveals that soft skills, entrepreneurship and creativity are
of greatest importance.

Though most employers were satisfied with analytical, language and technical
skills of MBA, they have a feeling that business schools are not doing enough to develop
soft skills. The recruiters say, “We place a major emphasis on people and leadership
skills. Generally we are very happy with the MBAs we pick and some have risen to fill
the majority of senior management positions, but many don’t make the grade at
interview. Many schools seem to neglect leadership development and organizational
behavior at the MBA level, despite these subjects being central to executive education
courses”. They further, add that many graduates lack ‘soft skills’, such as teamwork and
feel that there is an “inadequate supply of applicants of sufficient caliber”. Though
candidates are normally academically proficient, they lack soft skills such as
communication and numerical ability.

To meet the escalating demand of industry, most business schools are
increasingly offering soft skills training in leadership, management and communication
to MBA graduates to differentiate themselves from the crowd. Soft skills are becoming a
much bigger issue today as employers are particularly eager to find MBAs who have
been exposed to a wide range of soft skills training. Along with traditional financial
skills, schools that emphasize on leadership, communication and general management are able to attract higher quality candidates.

Soft skills are nothing but all aspects of generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills. There are no clear guidelines about soft skills, but majority of them are associated with positive values, leadership skills, and team work force, communicative skills and life-long learning. These skills are identified to be the most critical skills in the current job market. Soft skills are no longer confined to management education but extended to entire higher education system. Based on the research findings, the following top 10 soft skills have been identified and chosen to all institutions of higher learning. These are also the most common soft skills, which employers look for in those who aspire to managerial positions. It’s not necessary that one learn these in the workplace. He can learn all these in the classroom itself. It is an ideal learning ground and one can practice alternative ways of dealing with people, and facilitating learning and transferring knowledge in an interactive rather than prescriptive form. These include communication skills, time management skills, problem-solving skills, positive attitude, self-confidence, giving and taking constructive feedback etc.,

Management education in India is alienated from real-life. According to experts, there is a gap between the subjects and the objectives and this cannot help one achieve goals such as national development, and inculcating ethical, religious and spiritual values in business world.

In the era of information technology, the strength of a nation is strongly dependent on people’s intellectual skills. Thus, the development of human capital is important since it drives the nation’s vision and mission. Unless India improves its human capital quality, it will be lagging behind in this competitive world. However, the quality improvement in human capital comes from a quality education process. The need
of the hour is a carefully designed and well-planned education system, which is critical to developing such human capital. The business schools in India are playing a crucial and important role in producing human capital that is highly knowledgeable and skillful enough to meet the demands and expectations of corporate India. Covering soft skills in the curriculum of higher education is the need of the hour to develop quality human capital. In this context, it is worth to remember the words of Napoleon, "Do not wait; the time will never be just right. Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along".

1.4 Soft Skills for Enhancing Employability:

Soft skills play a very important role in making students employable. Sample the following instances, Robert graduated in management with a distinction, got an excellent placement from a blue chip company but could not sustain the pressure, and therefore put down his papers after serving for six months. Ron secured average marks but owing to his excellent communication skills along with his flexibility not only moved from a mediocre placement to an excellent company and profile, but also became part of the top management of a multinational corporation within a small time frame of five years. These two instances quite clearly indicate the importance of soft skills in modern day profession. Adjusting and aligning to change, working in a multi-cultural set up, interacting with transnational and multinational clients and vendors, supervising people from different ethnicity, requires more than pure domain knowledge. The chances of employability in a modern day scenario hinges on a very large extent to the right mix of domain knowledge with soft skills component. Absence of soft skills in a candidate might land him with a job, courtesy excellent domain knowledge, however he would not be able to sustain and move up the ladder in the long run due to the absence of the soft skills. Soft skills play the following role in making students employable-
• It enables them to be flexible in their approach.
• It makes them welcome change with an open mind.
• It encourages creativity and innovation.
• It fosters a culture of symbiotic growth between the employees and the organization.
• It enables an organization to grow intellectually finally culminating in revenue growth.
• It helps students to handle ever-increasing expectations from various business stakeholders.
• It encourages students to adopt ethical ways for long-term growth.
• It improves the communication skills; both verbal and written thereby better management of stakeholders.
• It imbibes relationship building and management skills, thereby ensuring long-term symbiotic growth.
• It enables the management to aggressively expand his operations.

1.5 Objectives of the Study:

Following are the main objectives of the study:

1. To study the relevance and importance of Soft Skills in both management and engineering institutions.

2. To bridge the gap between the campus and industry.

3. To find out the scientific and creative methods of teaching to the students.

4. To help in providing practical education to students so that they become plug and play employees in their organizations.
5. To find out innovative tools and techniques to impart Soft Skills to both faculties and students.

6. To find out probable grey areas to plug the inaccuracies and deficiencies in the present system.

7. To provide effective and efficient coordination amongst the students, faculties, educational institutions and the industry for the larger benefits towards society.

8. To study the socio-economic aspects of application of Soft Skills.

9. To prove beyond doubt that Soft Skills are essential from the post of peon to principal in every institution.

1.6 Hypothesis:

To put it in a nutshell, a hypothesis is an assumption about relations between variables. It is a tentative explanation of the research problem or a guess about the research outcome. Again hypothesis are classified as working hypothesis, research hypothesis, null hypothesis, statistical hypothesis, alternative hypothesis and scientific hypothesis.

The variable in the present research are students, faculty, management and industry (recruiters). After analyzing the following hypothesis were formulated and tried to be tested.

1) Socio-economic background of the respondents has a major role to play in effective implementation of soft skills.

2) Soft skills bring out the best results for students if there is effective coordination amongst students, faculty and management people.

3) Industry must come out with Special Training Program (STP) like Infosys Technologies Ltd to encourage the students and faculty.
4) There is a great stress on providing practical education to engineering and management students.

5) Activities like Role-playing, involving the active participation of students in brainstorming sessions, group discussions, and paper presentations are essential.

6) The industry has a vital role to play in this regard such as they need to absorb the students in their companies and then train and groom them in soft skills as students are fresh pass outs and also as they are flexible to absorb at this age.

1.7 Limitations of the Study:

The study is handicapped on account of the following limitations:

1) The research scholar has made the study exhaustive and interesting and has put in lot of efforts and energies. However, money and limited management and engineering institutions in the district of Nizamabad are the main limitation.

2) Besides, the study is confined to the district of Nizamabad only. All the information and inputs furnished by the respondents is treated as correct.

3) The results obtained by the faculties, students, recruiters and management are only 5 per cent of the entire population. It highlights purely from the perspective of soft skills that can determine the employability for the students. Besides, there could be other skills for not getting employment opportunities for the students.

4) The study is confined to management and engineering institutions not of non-professional institutions. Therefore, these are the limitations of the study.

1.8 Conclusion:

In this chapter the researcher focused on the background of the study and the various skills that collectively constitute soft skills.