

# A Systematic Review Of Requisite Focused Soft Skills For Employability

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## Abstract

This paper is a systematic review of the literature study of focussed skills which are demanded by the industry. Using systematic researches across two decades of publications, journals were selected for review. Key findings of the review include motivations: to enhance employability by addressing the skills in demand; barriers: resistance to change and lack of knowledge of requirements; and limitations such as absence of focus on employment while designing and rolling out curriculum of post graduate management students

## Key words

FocussedSkills training, Systematic review, Employability, Soft skills, Social skills

## Introduction

Over a period of time, various authors and establishments have emphasised the importance of soft skills (Ritter, Barbaral, Erika Mortimer, John W.Doll, Jessica L, 2018; Anthony, Suzanne Garner & Benjamin, 2014; Mitchell, Geana, Pritchett, Christal & Skinner, Leane, 2013; Fisher Anne, 2007).

In "The Soft Skills Disconnect" published by National Soft Skills Association (NSSA) it on Feb 13, 2015 it is mentioned that "Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center has all concluded that 85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills)."

Soft skills have been provided a range of nomenclature by various authors such as "Social skills" by Azim et al in 2010 in Importance of soft skills in complex projects, "interpersonal skills" by

Gillard in 2009 in "Soft skills and technical expertise of project managers," human skills" by Pant and Baroudi in 2008 in Project Management Education: The human imperative, "key skills" in 2006 in Skills for life by Simpson ..

Soft skills *may be defined as: 'non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular social contexts'* (Hurrell et al., 2013: 162) Parente, John Stephan, and Randy Brown (2012) defined soft skills as *people management skills*. ... In addition to this Hargis (2011) classified "work ethic, critical thinking, and problem solving" skills as part and parcel of *soft skills*. Fogle (2011) while defining soft skills included "teaming skills" in its *perview* in addition to communication and social skills.

Hard skills are strictly job-specific, closely connected with knowledge, easily observed, measured and trained. They constitute the core occupational requirements of a job. Soft skills are non-job specific, closely connected with personal attitudes which are intangible. This makes them more difficult to be quantified and developed. (ElenaDall'Amico, Simonetta Verona (CeipiemonteS.c.p.a.) Torino September 2015)

It is a well known fact that technical skills are a must and necessary for employment. However, in the present context, life skills or people skills have become vital and essential for survival and improved performance

at work place. It may be understood as the most important skills which are necessary in the current environment for employment in the corporate world. Until now there has been a lack of a sound, structured review analysing past publications and guiding future research on the approach for enhancing employability skills among post graduate management students

To fill this void, a systematic review of published articles on the importance of soft skills for employability has been undertaken. Using a systematic literature review approach, the remainder of this paper identifies the most important skills which are mandatory and important for employment from the perspective of operational and managerial aspects.

**Methodology**

A systematic review was undertaken because of its transparency and repeatability to investigate the aspects in including soft skills training within the education curriculum from 2000 to 2020. The systematic review followed four phases, adopted from Tranfeld, Denyer and Smart (2003) Figure 1

In the planning phase, the context-intervention-mechanism-output (C-I-M-O) framework (Figure 2) was applied to formulate the review questions and to undertake the scope of review (Denyer and Tranfeld 2009)

The sampling phase was rendered by the application of Ebsco Info, Pro Quest, Google Scholar and Emerald Insight databases.

Selection of the articles was carried out based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Since the review was contextualised within the relevancy of soft skills for employability w.r.t post graduate management education the exclusion criterion was soft skills applicability for engineering education and topics on hard business knowledge of subjects like economics and financial markets.

<b>Planning</b>	In this stage the research aim, objectives and scope are developed based on consideration of interest of research topics, time, finance and quality	Step 1 :Justify review objectives & scope Step 2:Screening the key articles Output : Review Protocol
<b>Sampling</b>	The purpose of the sampling phases to increase the literature source credibility by providing a transparent search and selection process using review protocol	Step 1 :Search the articles Step 2 :Select the articles Output :Select relevant articles
<b>Analysing</b>	Evidences are extracted from the selected sources and are then categorized to produce explanations or emerging theories accounting for the range of findings	Step 1 :Data extraction and Coding Output :Descriptive analysis, future research agenda

<b>Reporting</b>	A systematic review report provides a clear process of the review and enables repeatability of the review	1.Systematic review report which includes the detailed review process, results ,analysis ,gaps 2.Allocate evidence into practice
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**Figure 1 : Systematic Review Roadmap**

**Publication Trends : Countries and Status**

In total the search strategy identified 101 journal articles ,of which 42 met the final inclusion criteria . In order to characterise the body of literature ,we depict in figure the status of articles from different countries over thelast two decades ..USA 25 ,India 13, Sweden 2 ,Belgium 1 ,Poland 1 ,Pakistan 1 ,UK 3, Germany 1

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>Which relationships , ,institutional settings or wider systems are being studied ?</b>	<b>INTERVENTION</b>	<b>Which effects of the events, actions or activities are being studied ?</b>
	Post graduate management teaching- learning methodology ,Impact on employability , Industry skill needs		Internships, Guest lectures ,Workshops, Experiential learning , Continuous Assessment , Focused training
<b>MECHANISM</b>	<b>What are the mechanisms that explain the relationship between interventions and outcomes?</b>	<b>OUTPUT</b>	<b>What are the effects of the interventions?</b>
	Soft Skills Teaching - Learning Process		Benefits , Barriers or Limitations

**Figure 2 : C - I - M - O Framework**

**Reasons for excluding studies**  
No peer reviewed publications  
Duplicates

**Reasons for excluding studies**  
Context of study met the exclusion criteria

**Reasons for excluding studies**  
Constructs not relevant for inclusion criteria

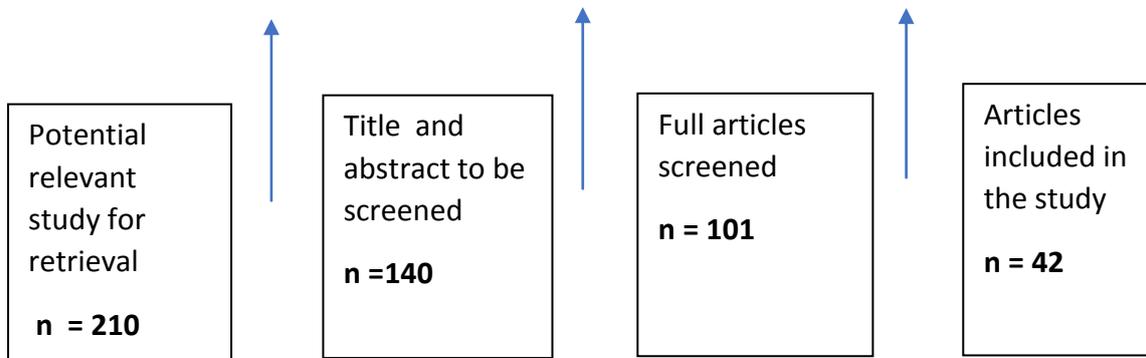


Figure 3 : Article Selection Process

## Results and Discussion

### Benefits

The main findings of the study are as mentioned in Figure 4

Out of 42 articles , 18 articles have highlighted the soft skills for employability as expected by the employees .

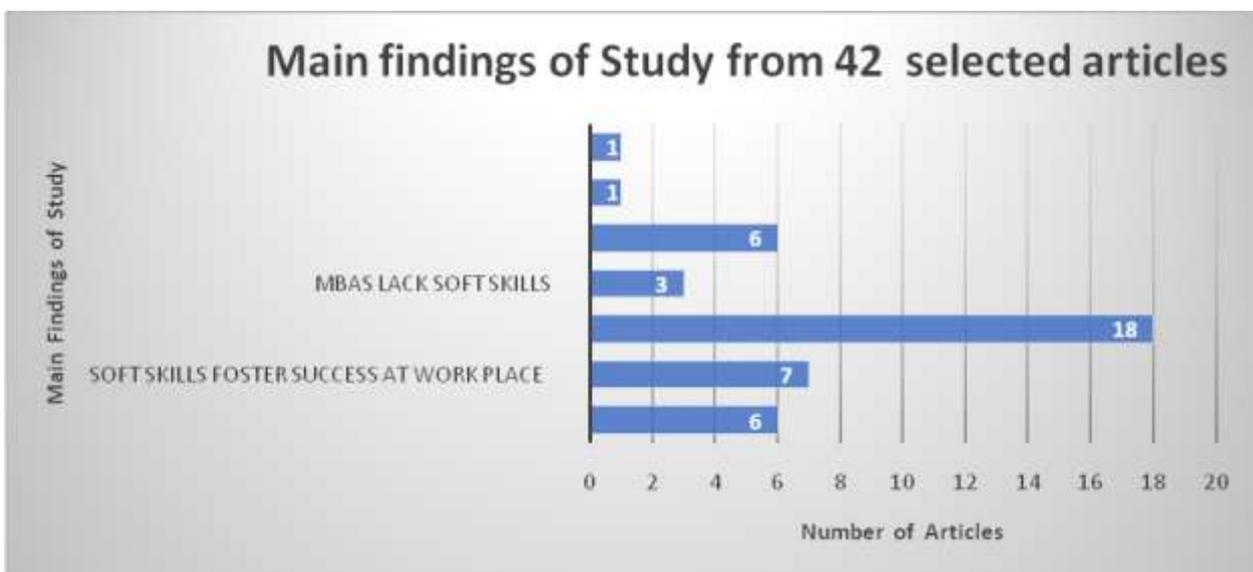


Figure 4 : Main Findings of Study from selected articles



**Figure 5 :Specific soft skills as expected by employers in Industry**

The most soughtafter soft skills by employees are as mentioned in Figure 5 Communication skills , Interpersonal and team skills , Problem solving and Critical thinking skills and Leadership skills are the essential Top 4 skills sought by employees .. Integrity ,Planning and Time management are the other important skills which are in demand . In addition, innovation /creativity , stress management , discipline , anger management ,motivation, persuasive and negotiation skills are also necessary skills to have.

**Barriers / Limitations**

The TOP three barriers or limitations discussed in the literature review are : Soft skills training not incorporated in the curriculum , MBA education do not include focussed soft skills training and MBAs lack soft skills.

More details onthe barriers of soft skills training for employability are provided in Table 1

	Barriers or Limitations	References
A	<b><i>Soft skills training not incorporated in curriculum</i></b>	
	1. The level of skills possessed by graduates is not n helping them to perform in the current job market.	MasuraRahmat et al in 2012
	2 .The skill gap consists of skills related to soft skills	I Padmini in 2014

	3. Learning is a complex process of personal and interpersonal skills required to be developed for leaders	Rowena Crosbie IN 2005
	4. Students should be made industry ready by making the curriculum for professional courses such as MBA in a way that provides complete on the job training.	Prasad and Purohit IN 2017
	<b><i>MBA education do not include soft skills training</i></b>	
	1. While graduating they should specially be educated to fill gap between college and corporate..	Gowsalya.G and Ashok Kumar.M in 2017
	2 .The curriculum need to be modified to include competencies and skills needed by job market	Rajanibala J. Shah et al in 2014
	3. Need for developing academic programs based on the development of competencies and skills necessary for the labour market	Iulianaparvu et al in 2014
	4. Practical and real world issue not discussed in classroom	Dasha Karzunina and Josie West in 2018
	5. Need of capacity building & skill development programmes and there should be strong active participation of educational institution to accomplish the mission.	Kaptan year 2014
<b>B</b>	6. The study suggests identify whether the level of skills possessed by graduates during their studies are not appropriate in helping them to perform in the current job market.	Nidhi Pandey in 2012
	<b><i>MBAs lack soft skills and industry perspective</i></b>	
	1. B-schools are responsible for producing MBAs who does not suite the Industry requirement	Datar in the year 2012
	2. The MBAs lack soft skills and global perspective	Datar, Garvin, & Cullen in 2010
<b>D</b>	<b><i>No gender based advantage w.r.t employability skills</i></b>	

	1. The study concludes that there was no significant difference in the overall employability skills between male and female students.	Bindhu Ann Thomas and Dr. K. V. Unninarayanan in 2018
E	<i>Lack of industry experience among faculty</i>	
	1. Employability skills training to be outsourced to competent professional organisations ..	Rubvita Chadha, et al in 2014

**Table 1 :Barriers / Limitations of Soft skills teaching - learning process**

### Conclusions

The conclusions are based on the analysis of 42 articles concerning soft skills for employability published from 2005 to 2018. In particular, the trend implies that research and publications within this topic are dominated by studies from the USA and India.

Generally, the review depicted that soft skills are a prerequisite for employment and employees expect the management graduates to possess these skills prior to joining the industry .

It was also concluded from the review that at the institute level , soft skills is not being accorded the importance which it deserves from a management graduate employability perspective.

This study may also be of use to educators / trainers who can use the information provided in terms of the most sought after skills required by industry in order to draft the curriculum and to train and guide the students entering the corporate world.

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