Soft Skills and The Selection Strategy

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Abstract - In the current business environment the selection process is very critical and involved. Soft skills are increasingly becoming the hard skills of today's work force. It's just not enough to be highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer, interpersonal and relationship-building skills that help people to communicate and collaborate effectively. These people skills are critical for organizations to remain competitive and be productive. Teamwork, leadership, and communication are enhanced by soft skills development. Since each is an essential element for organizational and personal success, developing these skills is very important and recruitment and selection process must focus on these qualities! Business leaders value technologists who have soft skills or people skills because they have empathy and the ability to influence the followers. Although many individuals inherently possess these abilities, others must work to develop them. Does your recruitment strategy include hiring for soft skills? If not, you should reconsider your tactics. Receiving a resume with all the right skills on it can be quite impressive, but this does not tell you anything about the candidate's work ethic, creativity, communication skills, problem solving capabilities, or other traits that, coupled with a strong skill set, make them a good hire. Hiring practices and recruitment strategies have to necessarily consider soft skills!

Keywords - Meaning of soft skill - interpersonal and relationship building, criticality for team work and relationship building, importance of soft skills in recruitment and hiring practices.

I.   INTRODUCTION

'Soft skills' is synonymous with "people skills." The term describes those personal attributes that indicate a high level of emotional intelligence, unlike hard skills, which describe a person's technical skill set and ability to perform specific tasks. Soft skills are broadly applicable across job titles and industries. It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get -- and keep -- the job. Good manners, optimism, common sense, a sense of humor, empathy and the ability to collaborate and negotiate are all important soft skills. Other soft skills include situational awareness and the ability to read a situation as it unfolds to decide upon a response that yields the best result for all involved.

Soft skills—which are needed to effectively communicate, problem-solve, collaborate and organize—are becoming more important for success as the workplace evolves socially and technologically. The problem is that recruiters and employment experts report a "soft skills gap," especially among young workers more accustomed to texting than talking, which constrains organizations to hire many candidates who fall short on interpersonal abilities. For one thing, these skills are difficult to teach, for another, they can be extremely challenging to screen for. That means HR must determine whether a candidate lacking in these abilities has the potential to learn them after being hired—a decidedly difficult call to make. After all, such capabilities are subjective in nature, especially when viewed in the context of a company's culture, business and industry. While a range of tools are available to help measure various soft talents, they can be only part of the solution.

II.   OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Recruitment and selection processes have been engaging the attention of many companies globally. While companies have always focused on hard skills of prospects, particularly the technical skills, as for a soft ware company, the attention on soft skills has been scanty if not totally absent. This has led to unsatisfactory results of recruitment, when companies find that the recruits so carefully selected for their technical merits , have outlived their utility when they are given new responsibilities are shifted to other teams. Many companies have indicated the lopsided recruitment policies as the reason for non-competitive succession and transfers by not giving importance to 'soft skills'. The present research is to find out the truth and assess ways and means to improve the situation. The following are the key objectives of this research paper:

1. A broad review of current recruitment scenario

2. Identify key soft skills as appreciated by companies

3. The role of Hard skills and soft skills as related by prospective recruiters

4. Steps taken by companies to improve the soft skill capabilities of Employees.

5. Futuristic projection of recruitment scenario.

6. Any recommendation from the researcher.

By a thorough analysis of available published information in research articles, papers and publications in print as well as in electronic media, the author was able to find answers to the above research questions mentioned in the objectives. A detailed list of current literature and references made is given at the end in the form of References and Bibliography. Discussions with a few

practicing Human Resources professionals and their comments and suggestions have also been considered.

III.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to a survey by Adecco Staffing USA, 44 percent of executives said a lack of soft skills was the biggest proficiency gap they saw in the U.S. workforce. And in a report from the International Association of Administrative Professionals, Office Team and HR.com, 67 percent of HR managers said they'd hire a candidate with strong soft skills even if his or her technical abilities were lacking, while just 9 percent would hire someone with strong technical credentials but weak soft skills. The stakes are higher than you might think. In an era when companies strive to become more efficient through the use of technology and data, it's easy to dismiss the ability to build relationships and collaborate as nice-to-have rather than need-to-have. But efficiency alone doesn't make an organization stand out. Companies need to be innovative as well—and to create an environment where talented workers want to come and stay. Efficiency and innovation each require a different mindset, "and what unites both is learning," says Edward D. Hess, professor of business administration at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. "We want people who can continuously learn with others in teams. That gets into all the soft skills. If your advantage is going to be outthinking competitors and dealing with customers, you've got to have soft skills."

An important soft skill is adaptability. An employee with this attribute has the ability to work in various situations equally well and move from one situation to another with ease and grace. The ability to be diplomatic and respectful even when there are disagreements is also a key soft skill. This skill requires the employee to maintain a professional tone and demeanor even when frustrated. An employee with a high level of emotional intelligence has good communication skills and interpersonal skills. He can clearly articulate goals and can work in a team. He knows when to take a leadership role and when to sit back. He knows when to speak, when to listen and when to suggest a compromise.

The organizational review and feedback systems can help employees identify which soft skills require improvement as much as can be by simply observing and emulating how others successfully interact with others and handle difficult interpersonal situations. A professional coach, self-help books and articles on leadership can assist in this process, as can self-assessment tools like the Myers-Briggs personality profile test."It's a cliché that people are hired for hard skills and fired for soft skills," says Bruce Tulgan, chief executive of the management consulting and training firm Rainmaker Thinking in New Haven, Conn.,

and author of *Bridging the Soft Skills Gap* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015). "But without [prioritizing soft skills], companies can encounter more internal conflicts, have customer service suffer and see good people leave."Research from the Hay Group revealed that managers who incorporate a range of soft talents into their leadership approach can increase their team's performance by as much as 30 percent. It "makes people feel valued and rewarded, gives them a clearer sense of high standards, and helps them feel more motivated," says Rick Lash, director for leadership and talent at Korn Ferry/Hay Group in Toronto.

IV.   STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

In hiring, then, how can HR determine the right balance between hard and soft abilities? Unfortunately, there's no simple answer that can be applied to all jobs, companies or industries. However, there are ways to step back and evaluate individual situations to come up with a workable mix. Candidates, for instance, need to bring diverse elements to the table. And hiring managers might give equal weight to factors such as a person's experience, cultural fit and soft skills. A number of tools are available to help employers gauge traits such as humility, empathy and compassion. Others measure emotional intelligence, interaction styles and problem-solving abilities. Analytics and testing will be important to hiring and developing growth (Of course, testing invariably means engaging consultants or purchasing the tools).

The Peters Corp., a Santa Fe, N.M. (USA) - based company with businesses in industries including hospitality and commercial real estate, forgoes tests. Instead, the HR department uses a series of drill-down questions to get at how candidates approach their work, collaborate and behave toward others in the office. These include:

- What is an example of a time when you worked on a project with more than one other person?

- How did the team allocate the work?

- What was the project's goal?

- Who decided what was going to be accomplished and who was going to do it?

- What was the outcome? Did you succeed? If not, what were the challenges?

- How well did you work with the team?

- What do you think a successful team looks like?

But neither data nor interviews are worth much if you don't know what you're looking for. On an organizational level, the first thing you need to decide is what soft skills really matter. You can't have it all. You have to articulate which ones are really important and then build them into your

selection process. In fact, how you approach this has got to be part of your culture and something you think about. Knowing what's important in your organization is part of what you anchor your culture to. The difficulty often comes when trying to determine whether a candidate will be a fit with your culture. You have to screen well so you understand whether a person lacks or has those soft skills.

Sometimes hard skills rule, but then you have to realize that you've got to help those people develop their soft skills. Companies often make the hire and forget about the development. HR is overwhelmed. They don't have enough time to work on development, especially of soft talents. Managers have to be involved in coaching, but they don't have time, either. That creates a domino effect whereby continuing deficiencies wreak havoc on the company. That dynamic is one reason Hess sees a future in which HR will regularly assess each worker's soft skills and then create an individualized development plan. While technology will facilitate feedback and evaluation, he says, it won't be central to delivering the necessary learning. "That's going to be done in teams by individuals," he says. Indeed, Hess predicts that the increasing emphasis on soft skills will spur a dramatic change in HR. "Human Resources will become Human Development," he believes. "Most people don't have training in soft skills. They'll need individual development plans, working with a mentor and coach to learn about thinking, relating, listening and collaborating." In many ways, that fits with the landscape as Millennials and members of Generation Z continue their progression in the workforce. Unfailingly, the trend has been that managers say young new hires are below expectations and standards when it comes to soft skills. Despite the growing need they see for these capabilities in the workplace, "employers are forced to source for hard skills while it becomes harder to source for soft skills across the board."

To a degree, that means organizations have to screen for development potential. "You can't change the way someone is at their core," Crain says, "but you can teach them to manage their approach." For example, an introvert may have to learn to be more outgoing in certain situations, like at a trade show, while an extrovert who's used to dominating the discussion at meetings may have to learn to state his or her case and then sit back and listen. It's all about the Role. The bottom line is that the weight these capabilities carry in a hiring decision depends on the role. "Some positions require soft skills more than others," says Parker McKenna, SHRM-SCP, chief human resource officer of the Springfield, Mo., public school system. Of course, a candidate must be qualified for the job first and foremost. "But once you're past that, you evaluate finalists on fit, value and soft skills," McKenna says.

While your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come. Your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, your emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success. With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills. Knowing how to get along with people – and displaying a positive attitude – is crucial for success. The problem is, the importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work.

V.   THE SOFT SKILLS GAP

When your workforce has lots of technical skills but an absence of soft skills, you have a soft skills gap. Soft skills are what accompany the hard skills, and help your organization use its technical expertise to full advantage. If you're really good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, chances are you have a soft skills gap. If you have lots of staff turnover and have to keep retraining people, chances are you have a soft skills gap. When you have lots of managers but no real leaders – that's a soft skills gap.

In fact, whenever you are unable to capitalize on the wealth of knowledge, experience and proficiency within your team, then you should be assessing the level of communication and interpersonal skills that are present in your organization. It's important to recognize the vital role soft skills play within your team and not only work on developing them within yourself, but encourage their development throughout the organization. Areas to examine and evaluate include: Personal accountability, The degree of collaboration, Interpersonal negotiation skills, Conflict resolution, People's adaptability and flexibility, The clarity of communications, Creative thinking, Coaching and mentoring

RECRUITMENT STRATEGY: HIRING FOR SOFT SKILLS

Does your recruitment strategy including hiring for soft skills? If not, you should reconsider your tactics. Receiving a resume with all the right skills on it can be quite impressive, but this does not tell you anything about the candidate's work ethic, creativity, communication skills, problem solving capabilities, or other traits that, coupled with a strong skill set, make them a good hire.

Communicating, whether it is verbal, in written, or through body language, is an important skill. Employees need to be able to clearly and efficiently express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Being able to effectively collaborate, work well with others, build relationships, manage conflict, and be a team player is crucial in many work environments. In order to perform their duties, an employee has to show up, work hard, and be willing to go the extra mile. Managers don't have time to micromanage every move an employee makes or walk them through every task. It is crucial to find a candidate that takes initiative and does the job right the first time. Change is common in most work environments. Being able to keep in an open mind and move forward with new responsibilities, challenges, and other changes makes a good employee. Problems of all shapes and sizes arise no matter what the position is. Having a good attitude, flexibility, creativity, and reasoning skills are helpful in overcoming challenges as they arise. Sometimes employers place great value on that elusive quality, 'the right fit'. Will they work well with existing employees? Do they share the same core values the company does?

For every position, create a job description that not only contains the key hard skills required, but also the necessary soft skills. Once you identify the desired soft skill behaviors for the position, name them and describe them. Add these skills to the basic job requirements so candidates know exactly what is expected of new hires. Look for candidates from sources that are well known for their strong soft skills. No matter how desperate you are to hire new talent, be cautious of red flags. What if a candidate shows up late for an interview or does not show enthusiasm for the position, these things should all raise a red flag telling you not to hire the candidate, no matter how great their resume looks or what their hard skills (technical skills) are. Place a heavy emphasis on the key soft skills of the position. You can do this by immediately sharing vivid descriptions of the hardest aspects of the job. Choose a research-based test that offers a quick baseline of the candidate's aptitude in soft skills. The best way to learn about an applicant is to use behavioral interviewing. Ask the interviewee to tell you a story, such as how they solved a problem at work. As they talk, listen and focus on their use of desired soft skills.

It's much easier to train new employees in technical skills and company procedures, and then it is to train them in soft skills. Learning to recruit for the necessary soft skills and then hire candidates who possess them will benefit your company.

Three Key Differences between Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills

- To be good at hard skills usually takes smarts or IQ (also known as your left brain-the logical center). To be good at soft skills usually takes Emotional Intelligence or EQ (also known as your right brain- the emotional center). Examples of hard skills include math, physics, accounting, programming, finance, biology, chemistry, statistics, etc… Examples of soft skills include self management skills like self confidence, stress management and people skills like communication or networking skills.

- Hard skills are skills where the rules stay the same regardless of which company, circumstance or people you work with. In contrast, soft skills are skills where the rules changes depending on the company culture and people you work with. For example, programming is a hard skill. The rules for how you can be good at creating the best code to do a function, is the same regardless of where you work. Communication skills are a set of soft skills. The rules for how to be effective at communications change and depend on your audience or the content you are communicating. You may communicate well to fellow programmers about technical details while struggle significantly to communicate clearly to senior managers about your project progress and the support needed.

- Hard skills can be learnt in school and from books. There are usually designated level of competency and a direct path as to how to excel with each hard skill. For example, accounting is a hard skill. You can take basic accounting and then advanced accounting courses. You can then work to get experience and take an exam and be certified as a CPA, etc.. In contrast, there is no simple path to learn soft skills. Most soft skills are not taught well in school and have to be learned on the job by trial and error and be adaptable; there aren't any easy step-by-step instructions on how to master a soft skill.

VI.   RECRUITING TRENDS THAT WILL BE DOMINANT IN FUTURE

It's been said so often that a company's greatest assets are its people, the concept has become mundane. Examine your recruitment and maximize your efforts with innovative practices that will attract the right candidates. What many organizations fail to recognize is that recruitment begins before you ever alert the masses to a new opening. Your company brand, social media coverage, reputation, employee reviews, and benefits package have already helped people decide if your organization is one they'd like to join. It's been found that 60 percent of candidates take into account an employer's reputation

when applying for jobs and 68 percent of job seekers will accept a lower salary for a company that makes a great impression. Find out what Employees love about working for you and what they wish was different. Go online and read any reviews employees have posted about your organization.

Among the top three reasons people change jobs are a lack of opportunities for advancement and dissatisfaction with the company culture and leadership. If your company is hemorrhaging good people, then stopping their exodus is the first thing you need to do to improve recruitment strategy in future. If, however, you're already holding on to your best talent, it's time to use your retention success to help you find other great hires. Candidates are doing more research into prospective employers than ever, so you want to make sure they're getting this crucial information.

It is suggested that the Resumes may be kept anonymous till the screening process is completed and blind interviews conducted in order to avoid any bas in the screening process. Finding Talent is not so difficult with the growth of social media and the internet. But attracting them is more difficult. Top candidates will be harder to sell because the drop in unemployment rate and the creation of more jobs means more choices and competing offers. In order to be successful, recruiters will have to develop much stronger selling skills in the areas of convincing prospects to apply, to come to multiple interviews and to accept your offers. Literally, for centuries, sourcing or finding talent has been extremely difficult. However with the growth of the Internet and social media, it is now possible to find almost anyone who is qualified to do a job. So now the most difficult phase of recruiting will become the "selling aspects." Video usage is increasing because of their high impact. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, think what a video is worth because it is more eye-catching and engaging. Most recruiting leaders find that videos are the very best way to reveal the excitement and the passion that can be found at your firm. If the videos are shot by your own employees on their mobile phone, they are also likely to be considered more authentic and believable. Misleading job descriptions can also increase new hire turnover when they realize that the job described in the outdated description is completely different than the job that they discover on the first day. The most innovative firms like Apple, Google, Face book and Amazon produce significantly higher workforce productivity (i.e. revenue per employee) than the average firms in the industry. This is because they focus on hiring innovators, who produce at least 10 times more than the average worker in the same job. Innovators also allow a firm to be first in the marketplace, which builds the product brand and often produces high margins. In business, it is better to be prepared … than to be surprised. But unfortunately, rather

than being forward-looking, 100 percent of all current recruiting metrics are historical and backward looking. Being forward-looking may also help your career because others will view you as strategic because you continually look and plan ahead.

Social media not only allows your business to find candidates and generate leads faster, but allows for a direct connection to candidates who may want to work for the company, even if they're not actively searching for a new position. Social media also helps to build a network of connections that includes both passive and active candidates. And since this network of candidates is constantly evolving; there is always a chance of someone being qualified for a position. Another benefit of social media technology is that it's easy to manage and monitor your progress and analyze what's working and what isn't. Tracking your social media efforts to see where successful candidates are coming from and what drew them to your company.

Though Face book, LinkedIn and Twitter are the most well-known, don't discount other social media outlets. As is the case with almost any new technology, social media is very much about deciding what's the best fit for each company, leveraging what works and discarding what doesn't. With so many people using social media, you have to understand not everyone's using the same networks. It can vary by industry. Indeed.com performed a survey that showed one of the fastest-growing social media sites was Instagram. That could make a lot of sense for companies with a design, photography, architecture or travel focus, for instance, but it's all about which technology and platforms you can use to drive engagement, loyalty, and better business responses.

VII.   CONCUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

An overview of the current recruitment scenario has been given in the above pages. The prospective employees are choosy about the company they would lie to work for. In order to make your recruitment more efficient and effective, you need to understand the hard skill and soft skill requirements of your key employees. Your recruitment process starts when you write the job description for a new position. Pay adequate attention to describe the soft skill requirements on the job and follow it up with suitable recruitment test s and interviews. Reward and hire more and more innovators to keep the company with a leading edge.

Companies are trying to identify the 'Soft skill' GAPS at various levels, particularly in strategic positions so that they can fill up this gap through new recruits or re-training the existing potential employees for the GAPS identified!

In the futuristic scenario make sure your social media sites are accessible to candidates via your company's Careers page, in employees' email signatures, company newsletters and job announcements. If job-seekers don't know about your social media presence and can't access these sites, the strategy won't be successful, and you could miss out on some great talent. Social media has to be a supplement to traditional hiring strategies, not a replacement for them. An old advertising adage is that half of your advertising budget is wasted. The problem is, you don't know which half. The same is true for recruitment advertising, marketing and social media. As the recruitment media universe has become more fractured, it's more important than ever to have a presence in as many different places as possible to reach the widest possible audience.

Every company is different, so trends don't impact every firm the same. However, if your firm must dominate your recruiting marketplace, you have no choice but to follow and to occasionally start trends. One way to continually become aware of trends is to create a Google alert covering "recruiting trends." 2017 recruitment strategy starts now. In 2016, the number of job changers in January was 29% higher than the monthly average. With the majority of job changers landing their role within 60 days, your 2017 prospects are likely to be looking for new roles now. Don't miss out on the talent that is on the move now.

Food for thought – most of us have spent at least 16 years in school focused mainly on building our hard skills full time and a little on our soft skills through team projects, sports, and social activities. To succeed in our career, should we spend at least another 16 years or more to proactively master the soft skills necessary to advance our careers? Never forget, one very good hire is much better than three or four or five mediocre hires. No matter where you are on the skill spectrum, build in soft skills criteria systematically in every aspect of your staffing strategy and hiring process.

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