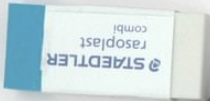




DO SOFT SKILLS MATTER?



"Soft skills are not just innate but can also be learned as hard knowledge and applied in various contexts. Extremely important and extremely captivating"

- Purba Hardjosusono

THE NETHERLANDS



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When I was asked to write about "Why soft skills are important?" I immediately thought: but what then are hard skills? Don't soft and hard have an enormous overlap and, moreover, aren't these inextricably intertwined, just like our body and mind? However, I came to understand that soft skills refer to interpersonal abilities rather than substantive knowledge. Yet, I don't believe that soft skills and substantive knowledge are polar opposites. Soft skills, in my opinion, are crucial for survival and can be learned just like substantive knowledge.

Growing up with a Dutch mother and an Indonesian father, I was exposed to two very different cultures and my parents had to work hard on their soft skills to understand each other and maintain a healthy relationship. This early exposure helped me develop a better understanding of soft skills, particularly the importance of paying attention to people's behavior rather than just their words.

Even babies must rely on their soft skills to get what they want when crying, laughing, and gesturing. Soft skills are thus crucial for survival in any interaction with people, from young to old, from personal relationships to business interactions. To establish long-term relationships we need to understand, empathize with, and engage with others. Understanding people, reading their emotions, and hence being able to live and work together is essential for long-term success and happiness.

During my business studies, I was educated not only in hard subjects like economics and finance but also in behavioral sciences like psychology and sociology. And when I worked for ten years in the nineties in an international management consulting firm, the understanding and application of soft skills were already recognized as crucial for success in all our assignments with clients. Change management and group facilitation training were essential in achieving results, which by the way were always made measurable, made hard so to speak.

To my opinion, understanding how people deal with pressure and stress is vital to success in organizations and these skills are not only important on an individual level but also to establish synergy within the various groups of people that make up an organization.

And in an international setting cultural differences add another layer of complexity. Here a thorough understanding and ability to apply soft skills are crucial and essential for success in navigating different cultural contexts, whether on a national, a professional, or on an organizational level. After more than 25 years of managing my own international business I not only dare to say that I am still learning every day, but that I must keep on learning every day in order to keep up with our fast changing world.