Social Skills: A Factor to Employees' Success

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Abstract

Although the concept of social skill is not new, organizational behavior scholars have just recently started to study the role of social skill in career success. Social skills are important because they allow us to interact with each other with predictability, so that we can more readily understand each other and be understood. Strong social skill can facilitate interpersonal interactions, which can in turn lead to effective job outcomes. Social skills also allow an individual the opportunity to express both positive and negative feelings in interpersonal situations without losing social reinforcement. Some researchers have suggested that social skills are a learned behavior and increased interactions may occur with specific training and opportunities to practice these skills over time.

Keywords: skills, social skills, success

Introduction

One of the most important goals of any organization is to promote efficiency and effectiveness that could lead to organizational success. The studies show that if the organizational strategies and technology would be complex, its main key success is human factor.

Human resource is one of those capital resources of an organization and it act as a sheer source of competitive advantage which is inimitable (Mosadeghrad, 2003). Considering this fact organization’s success is based on individual communications and their focus towards achieving required social skills.

Social skill, or the ability to effectively interact with others, is becoming increasingly important for organizations as more team based arrangements are used and more service-oriented jobs are employed (Hochwarter, et al. 2004). Also, social skills can be regarded as personality traits or personality capabilities that contribute to psychosocial outcomes (Paulhus & Martin, 1988).

Good social skills include both what is said during a social interaction and how it is said. When communicating with another person, the verbal content of the message, that is, the person’s choice of words or phrases is important. How that message is communicated can be just as
important. For example, appropriate facial expressions, body language, eye contact, and a good, firm voice tone all help to communicate the message. Social skills training aims at improving both what people say during interactions and how they say it (Alan, et al. 2004). On the other hand, social effectiveness is identified as the ability to effectively read, understand, and control social interactions (Ferris et al., 2002). One of factors to attain goals in any field is individual interactions. The current study is an example of a growing awareness that social skills are multidimensional and multifaceted. Therefore, we will try to familiar it; then we will survey outcomes of social skills in organizations.

**Nature of social skills**

Early social skills interventions targeted simple, prerequisite behaviors such as orienting toward another person and making eye contact (Lovaas, 1977). Although the concept of social skill is not new, organizational behavior scholars have just recently started to study the role of social skill in career success (Hochwarter, et al. 2006).

Social skills can be defined as the set of skills people use to interact and communicate with one another. They are based on the social norms of our society and they tell us what attitudes and behaviors are considered to be normal, acceptable and expected in a particular social situation (Patrick, 2008). Libet and Lewinsohn (1973) defined social skill as a complex ability that produces behaviors that will be positively reinforced and not produce behaviors that will be punished by others.

According to Elliott and Gresham (1987), the definitions of children’s social skills used in research are divided into three groups; peer acceptance, social behaviors, and social validity. The third definition of social validity is the most comprehensive, as it combines the first two definitions of peer acceptance and social behaviors. The social skills in the social validity definition are the child’s behaviors in specific situation that reflect the child’s attitude toward the acceptance by peers and adults, academic competence, self-concept, and psychological adjustment. Social skills are subdivided and operationalized by five domains – approaches to learning, self-control, interpersonal skills, externalizing problem behavior, and internalizing problem behavior (Yoon Sung, 2009). Many definitions also describe social skills in terms of an interaction between an individual and his or her environment.

Social skills are important because they allow us to interact with each other with predictability, so that we can more readily understand each other and be understood. Without an agreed-upon social way of interacting, it is very hard to prevent misunderstandings. It is important for us to be able to interact with clarity (Patrick, 2008).

Riggio (1986) developed the Social Skills Inventory (SSI) to measure an individual’s degree of sensitivity, control, and expressiveness in the emotional and social domains. The measures of emotional sensitivity, control, and expressiveness focus on nonverbal displays. Emotional sensitivity involves the skill to receive and decode nonverbal messages from others. Emotional control is the ability to regulate displays of emotionality. Emotional expressiveness is the ability...
to reveal affective states. In contrast, the measures of social sensitivity, control, and expressiveness focus on overt verbal behavior. Social sensitivity is the ability to understand verbal messages from others. Social control focuses on social role-playing skill. Finally, social expressiveness focuses on verbal speaking ability and the facility to engage others in conversations.

**Outcomes of social skills**

Strong social skill can facilitate interpersonal interactions, which can in turn lead to effective job outcomes.

Social skills are encouraged positive interactions with others, avoided or terminated negative social interactions with others (Flowers, 2008). There are many benefits of social interaction. For example, participating in social activities could cause you to have many feelings such as: belonging, acceptance, and confidence. Social activities can help you to make friends, feel good about yourself and do many things that you could not do on your own such as win a team sport or complete a major project (Pettry, 2006).

Social skills also allow an individual the opportunity to express both positive and negative feelings in interpersonal situations without losing social reinforcement (Hersen & Bellack, 1977).

Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) find positive return to occupying leadership positions in high school, especially in managerial occupations. Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo (2000) found that prosocial skills (cooperating, helping, sharing, and consoling) in 3rd grade was a better predictor of 8th grade academic achievement than 3rd grade academic achievement (Flowers, 2008).

Borghans, Weel, and Weinberg (2006) show that people who are sociable early in life are more likely to hold jobs in which people tasks are important, and that returns to people skills are greater in these jobs. In addition, compared to other career success predictors, such as conscientiousness and general mental ability, social skill is unique in that it is more malleable (Segrin & Givertz, 2003).

More recently, however, social skill has been theorized as a moderating variable that enhances people’s performance (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). In particular, Witt and Ferris (2003) found that social skill moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance, such that the relationship was stronger for individuals with higher social skill (Okumura & Usui, 2010). Similarly, Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter (2001) found that social skill moderates the relationship between general mental ability and job performance and salary, such that the performance rating and salary were highest for individuals with both high social skill and general mental ability (Okumura & Usui, 2010).
Johnson and Johnson (1999) list six important outcomes of being socially skilled. The first desirable outcome is personal development and identity because most people’s identity is "created out of relationships with others. As a result of interacting with others, we have a better understanding of ourselves." Individuals who have few interpersonal skills have distorted relationships with others and tend to develop inaccurate and incomplete views of themselves. Social skills also tend to enhance “employability, productivity and career success,” major skills required in the real world of work. The most important skills, especially for higher paying jobs, are getting others to cooperate, leading others, coping with complex situations, and helping solve people’s work-related problems.

**Quality of Life** is another positive outcome of social skills because everybody needs good, close, intimate relationships in life. **Physical health** is promoted also through positive and supportive relationships. Research has shown that high-quality relationships are linked to longer lives and to quicker recovery from illness and injury. Research has also shown that **psychological health** is strongly influenced by positive and supportive relationships with others. An incapacity to establish and sustain positive relationships with others very often leads to anxiety, depression, frustration, alienation, and loneliness. It has been proven that the ability to build positive relationships with others reduces psychological distress, while increasing autonomy, self-identity, and self-esteem. The sixth important benefit that results from having social skills is the **ability to cope with stress**. Supportive relationships have been shown to decrease the number and severity of stressful events and to reduce anxiety. Such relationships help individuals cope with stress by providing caring, information, resources, and feedback (Johnson and Johnson, 1999).

**Conclusion**

As noted above, extant research shows that social skill plays a role influencing individuals’ success and it is important because allow us to interact with each other with predictability.

Some researchers have suggested that social skills are a learned behavior and increased interactions may occur with specific training and opportunities to practice these skills over time (e.g., Gonzalez-Lopez & Kamps, 1997). The discussion of social skill and the construction of fields have so far remained abstract. The theory of social skill and fields is applicable to a range of sociological phenomena that share common characteristics. It is possible, therefore, to consider the empirical scope of the ideas proposed in this paper.

Finally, there is need to conduct further research which will give a holistic view on the true nature, complex sources and effects of social skills in organizations. This research will motivate managers to develop appropriate coping mechanisms to manage social skills.

**Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to acknowledge the department of research, Rafsanjan Branch of Islamic Azad University for their support and contribution to this study.
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