

Nurturing Leaders for Tomorrow – With Life Skills Education

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Abstract

The fierce competition in global scenario investigates youth to embark the challenges of life. Unfortunately shifting life styles, nuclear homes, materialistic desires and redundant pedagogy of education has paved way for an upsurge growth in stress, anxiety, suicidal tendencies among youth. They lack the desired leadership, creative, emotional intelligence skills, which sums up together as life skills, required for sustainability in personal and professional dimensions. The crux of the problem is that critical thinking, problem solving and application of concepts are in short supply among youth, as they never had exposure to it. In respect to India more than 700 million Indians are expected to be of working age group by 2022; although by FICCI skills report 2012 only 25% professionals are employable. The scenario is alarming, as by year 2030, half of India's population will be younger than 28. The research paper tries to co-relate the lack of life skills education in youth's formative years which leads to low conceptual, creative ability leading to dearth of leaders in pipeline through a pilot survey of MBA students regarding their life skills quotient. The paper proposes to nurture leadership skills by imparting life skills education in the foundation days itself.

Keywords: Creativity, Leader, Life Skills

1. Introduction

'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, let my country awake!'

The above poem by Rabindranath Tagore aspired for a free India where our youth would be free with calm, composed satisfied life. But even after many decades the poem remains still a distant reality. One of the turbulent problem of today's organizations is dearth of leaders across the globe. The companies need to build a strong pipeline of budding leaders, to sustain the uncertain environment, who can take on global issues with poise and patience. The issue is gaining much emphasis as a leader is no longer restricted to the periphery of its national boundary. He has to take care of perspectives of all the stakeholders and delivering values which is acceptable to them. Apart from this he has to be courteous with courage and integrity as companies focus on customer based solutions along with products. Unfortunately we have dearth of leaders across the globe. As per the research survey of Center for Creative Leadership 2014 the table magnifies the erosion of qualities of global leader.

It is apparent that leaders lack in managing team, in being innovative, handling people and managing change. A deep introspection suggests that problem is not superficial. A youth who has got no exposure for creative thinking, who has never handled turbulence cannot be expected to rise to a world class leader within few years of working. It has to be an ongoing process starting right from the beginning of a person's education.

According to a study by Lancet in India nearly 1,87,000 people committed suicide in the year 2010 . As per WHO; India has nearly 1,70,000 suicidal cases which culminate untimely to deaths every year. It is an irony that when we should be gearing up to reap the benefits of demographic dividend for the year 2030; we are battling suicidal cases that too with maximum in the age group of 15-29 years of age. The same study further indicates that the high literacy rates contribute to more suicides.

All this statistical figures indicate whooping connection between our present education system and the personality of our youth that is withering from this type of education. Aiming for perfection with materialism to be achieved

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Table 1. The challenges leaders face around the World--©2014 center for creative leadership
Top 10 (of 34) challenge mentioned by leader in each country

Rank	China (% mention)	Egypt (% mention)	India (% mention)	Singapore (% mention)	Spain (% mention)	UK (% mention)	US (% mention)
1	Developing Managerial Effectiveness(26.3%)	Developing Employees (20.8%)	Developing Managerial Effectiveness(23.0%)	Inspiring Others (23.2%)	Leading a Team (40.4%)	Guiding Change (30.0%)	Developing Managerial Effectiveness(26.0%)
2	Inspiring Others (22.2%)	Developing Managerial Effectiveness (18.9%)	Developing Employees (19.0%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (20.5%)	Inspiring Others (20.2%)	Leading a Team (20.8%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (24.0%)
3	Developing Employees (20.2%)	Guiding Change (17.0%)	Guiding Change (17.0%)	Developing Employees (18.8%)	Achieving Results(17%)	Re-Developing Managerial Effectiveness(20.8%)	Guiding Change (22.6%)
4	Mobilizing Collaboration(18.2%)	Leading a Team (17.0%)	Managing Process (16.0%)	Managing Retention and selection (18.8%)	Communicating Effectively(17.0%)	Developing Employees (17.0%)	Developing Employees (15.1%)
5	Managing internal Stakeholders and politics (17.2%)	Inspiring Others (16.0%)	Inspiring Others (15.0%)	Leading a Team (17.9%)	Guiding Change (17.0%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (16.0%)	Inspiring Others (15.1%)
6	Managing Retention and selection (15.2%)	Leading Vision(14.2%)	Managing Retention and selection (14.0%)	Developing Managerial Effectiveness(15.2%)	Developing Employees (17.0%)	Inspiring Others (16.0%)	Leading Vision(13.0%)
7	Managing Process (11.1%)	Managing Process (11.3%)	Leading Vision(14.0%)	Leading Vision(15.2%)	Mobilizing Collaboration(14.9%)	Navigation Globalisation (15.1%)	Leading a Team (11.0%)
8	Leading Vision (11.1%)	Managing performance (10.4%)	Leading a Team (13.0%)	Guiding Change (15.2%)	Developing Managerial Effectiveness(13.8%)	Managing Process(11.3%)	Mobilizing Collaboration(10.3%)
9	Leading a Team (10.1%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (13.0%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (13.0%)	Managing Talent (10.7%)	Managing External Environment (10.6%)	Leading Vision (11.3%)	Being Recognized as a Leader (9.6%)
10	Guiding Change (10.1%)	Managing conflict(9.4%)	Mobilizing Collaboration(10.6%)	Managing performance (9.8%)	Managing Internal Stakeholders and politics (10.6%)	Driving Growth(9.4%)	Leading with Less(7.5%)

at the earliest is creating havoc which leads to stress and emotional instability. This is cemented further by a report which states that only 25 % of total Indian professionals are considered employable by organized sector³. These reports raise few alarming questions like; does our education system prepares to battle the adversaries of life ; prepare youth to cope with uncertainties of life and take on the challenges of a dynamic leader. The paper tries to explore the reasons behind the lack of life skills among youth tracing back the root cause to their formative years which are the major contributors of dearth of dynamism, creativity, interpersonal skills among youth which are the basic prerequisite for a 21st century global leader.

2. Life Skills

According to Wikipedia life skills are problem solving behaviours used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs. They are set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily life. As per WHO, life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychological skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way. It contributed to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problem and protection of human rights. Around the world, LSBE is being adopted as a means to empower young people in challenging situations⁷. The ten life skills considered in this research study are:



Figure 1. List of selected life skills .

2.1 Coping with Emotions

To be aware about ones emotions and to know how emotions affect our personality and behaviour.

2.2 Coping with Stress

To be aware about sources of stress. To deal in dignified and mature manner when stress arises and copes with it effectively.

2.3 Creative Thinking

Enables to explore available alternatives and consequences of actions and contributes to decision making & problem solving. It helps adolescents to respond adaptively and with flexibility to the daily life situations.

2.4 Critical Thinking

Ability to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. Further, to help adolescents to recognize and to assess the factors influencing attitude and pressures from peer and family.

2.5 Decision Making

The ability to develop, prioritize and attain goals of life and to be able to choose life style, food habits, hobbies and study subject of their own choice, along with to be assertive to say no to alcohol, drugs and cope up with stress, STD and AIDS.

2.6 Effective Communication

To know about verbal and non-verbal communication skills along with common sense to analyse when to speak and when to be silent and to be an active listener.

2.7 Empathy

To be sensitive towards others feelings and to show care towards people with disability and HIV infected patients

2.8 Interpersonal Relationships

To be able to develop and nurture supportive networks, to help adolescents to relate with people in positive ways and to be able to end relationships constructively.

2.9 Problem Solving

To be aware about problems and deal with it step by step.

2.10 Self-Awareness

To know thyself, to be aware about rights and responsibilities and to have confidence.

3. Current Scenario

Thoughtful effort needs to be undertaken to bring in life skills in academic curriculum. Life Skills education is very important and integral part of education system worldwide. In Indian schools, however, life skills education is yet to be fully initiated and recognized as an integral part of the curriculum⁷ though CBSE, in 2012, has presently introduced life skills training programme as part of continuous and comprehensive evaluation targeted at the adolescent students between 10-18 years of age. But most often it is confused with vocational education. It needs to be imparted from the beginning so that youth is ready for future horizons⁹.

Inclusion of life skills education hopefully will lessen the rising unemployment among youths. Unemployment leads to stress which is one of major contributor of rising crime rates. As per NCRB crime against women has raised to 41 % in India. Educated, but unemployed, young job seekers make 49 % of total unemployed in India and are prone to evil deeds. With current economic growth the problem is further aggravated as more than 75 % of new job opportunities are expected to be skill based.

The situation is alarming as India will partake demographic dividend by the year 2030, which means more working age population in relation to its total population. This will lead to sudden influx of unemployment resulting in disgruntled youth which will be difficult to control⁷. They need to be guided in the right direction to protect them from stress and lead them to positivity.

4. Stress

Stress is said to physical and mental reaction of body to an emotional situation which affects the daily working of a person and causes discomfort. A little stress is required in our daily life to keep us going. It prepares us for abnormal situations and instils in us the courage and motivation

to work further. But extremity of anything is bad and so when stress is high it hampers the normal function of the individual.

It has been studied that most of the Asian countries put pressure on their wards to perform well academically and excel in all other extracurricular activities. Our schools and colleges follow rigorous educational system demanding a person to perform well in competitive and university examinations. Children in Japan are sent to juku to prepare for entrance exams along with their daily studies. With respect to school stress, stressful school environments have been linked to children's experiencing inordinate amounts of fatigue, headaches, stomach aches, illness, and exacerbation of allergies and conditions such as asthma and diabetes⁶.

These symptoms are just an indicator of stress at school which are not restricted to only these but develop to behavioural problems. Stress experienced by generation Y comes not only from pressures from outside such as family, friends, and college but also within themselves. Stress is also generated by technology. Technology though is boon but it has marred creativity of youth as it sways away the imaginative power. The most alarming trend is being glued to TV rather than harbouring their time on creativity. Even less number of comments and likes on social networking sites are apt to raise the psychological trigger. Here role of family, society and educational institutes play a significant part in sustaining stress and teaching life skills for development.

5. Role of Family, Society and Educational Institutes in Imparting Life Skills

The first educator of a person is family. It plays a crucial role in shaping up a person's personality. Education therefore needs to be imparted in the real sense by rooting it in the persona of the person. Often the adults react negatively and don't bother to satisfy the quest of their offspring's. This starts the ladder for assumption, acceptance of rote learning and often accepting whatever is served in the platter. This ultimately inhibits the conceptual creative growth which fixes its root so deep that it's almost impossible to shed its skin in youth. Society too expects accepted standard routine behaviour. We are so engulfed by societal norms that we often curve the natural growth

of personality. It is an irony that often the blame is rested on educational institute for lack of life skills though the fact is that family, society and educational institute all play a vital role in imbuing the life skills in different extent at different stages of a person's life. How a parents deals with their children, what types of interpersonal relationship they maintain in addition to exposure to society a person had in his formative years goes a long way in shaping up and polishing his/her persona.

Modern day Parents are already zeroing in and gradually understanding and giving ample freedom to enhance the ability of the budding citizens. They are seeking in suggestions in household matters and are even ready to stand in support with their ward in case he /she chooses offbeat path. Though the number is minuscule still we can say the dynamics of change has crept in.

However due to cultural, economic, financial disparity some of the families may lack the desired life skills and soft skills. Society too has become a public place with social media sites and fake relationships. So primarily the majority responsibility lies with educational institutes to develop life skills as an incumbent spends nearly 8 hours daily in the institute's premises for many years. Moreover formative age learns more with peers and mentors. Yet role of all three pillars is pervasive and crucial.

6. Research Methodology

It is beyond doubt that school and college education, which is devoid of basic life skills, is hampering our

youth to be prepared for challenges of personal and professional world. A pilot survey was done to understand preparedness of youth by analysing the life skills quotient present among youth in Nagpur.

- Objective: To identify the important life skills in youth
- Sample Size: 80 management students from Nagpur from two management institutes.
- Sampling Technique Used: Simple and Stratified Random Sampling

The life skills in the youth have been restricted to the given Table 2 for the purpose of this research. It includes self awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, and problem solving, coping with stress and coping with emotions.

6.1 Scope of the Study

Management is essential in all spheres of life be it personal or professional domain. This cannot be achieved in a day. It requires training and education during formative years itself though the result bores its fruit when one attains youth. Management students and youth in general cannot be categorized into two different compartments. Whether one is pursuing graduation, engineering or any other course because of credit based rating system the students have the option to choose subjects of their choice. Even in normal course management subject are included in most of the courses. So most of the youth pursuing education are learning management through one or the other medium of instruction. The survey intends to put forward

Table 2. Source researcher - showing ascribed meanings to the respective life skills

SN	Life Skill	Assigned Definition
Q1	Self Awareness	Have self control and awareness about responsibilities
Q2	Empathy	Prejudice and discriminate against people, caring for people with disability
Q3	Interpersonal Relationship	a) Value relationships with friends and families, b) Survive loss of friendships in a mature manner
Q4	Communication	Basic verbal and nonverbal communication skills, opinion freely without any fear
Q5	Critical Thinking	Analyze information in objective manner, choices and risk influenced by peers
Q6	Creative Thinking	a) Develop capacity to think in creative ways, b) Adapt easily to changing social circumstances
Q7	Decision Making	Steps for decision making and decision about important life plans
Q8	Problem Solving	a) Disturbed by problems, b) Awareness about Conflict resolution
Q9	Coping with Stress	Sources of stress in our life, control levels of stress
Q10	Coping with Emotions	Respond to emotions appropriately and how emotions affect the way we behave

Source: Compiled by the researcher

the crux of the problem of lack of employability skills due to absence of life and soft skills, talent shortage, as most of the surveys claim and recommend few suggestion based on the report through the medium of the management student as ultimately managing activities, interpersonal relationship and accomplishing the optimum results is sole discretion. Even our epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are great source of management strategies of managing the kingdom, interpersonal relationship within the family and liaising with other kingdoms when there was no formal management course. Most of the students in the survey were of diverse educational background with engineering, commerce, arts and some having work experience. Though the sample had minority in size it had spectrum of majority.

6.2 Limitation of the Study

It is rightly quoted that a spark is enough to light the house. On the same projection the survey might just include a small quotient of the B-school students the trend gives an ample scope for future research and can be said to point in the right direction. The results of the findings are in synchronization with the FICCI skills reports 2012 which proclaims the lack of employability among youth due to skills shortage.

Management students of two institutes were surveyed in Nagpur, a city which is considered to be one of the educational hub. The diverse economic, financial, societal background in addition to different language and culture of the students was apt enough to get a glimpse of real scenario. More so ever, it is not feasible to cover all the management all over the India though the sample tried to have diversity.

7. Data Interpretation

The data interpretation for some life skills like relationship with friends, self-awareness, ability to develop creative thinking and communicating with peers are having high regards. Self-awareness is ranging from 70% to 90%. On the other hand, there is a medium degree of positive trait in the range of 60 % to 70 %, with respect to Decision Making, Empathy and Problem Solving (awareness).

The low negative skills include the range of negation between 45 to 55 percent, and it includes, Creative Thinking and Coping with Stress. Further negative life skills include Interpersonal Relationship (maturity in

friendship), Critical Thinking and Coping with Emotions between 30 to 40 percent negations.

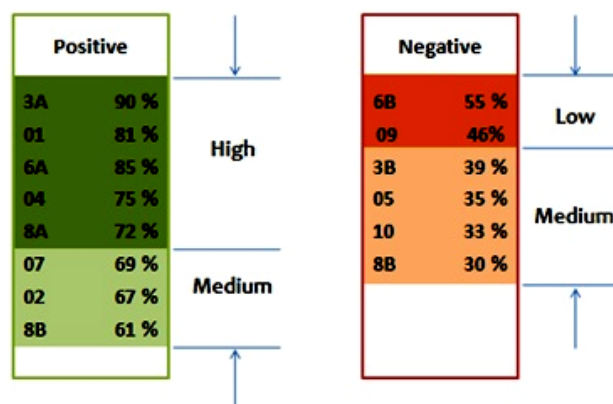


Figure 2. Positive and negative life skills.

8. Inference

The positive life skills in the youth were found to be Self-Awareness, ability to develop Creative Thinking, and Communication. When asked about presence of these skills in their personality, they answered in a highly positive affirmation. This shows that for the above skills, management students do not perceive any absence. The medium response is shown to the skills like Decision Making, Empathy, adaptability to environment and Coping with Stress. This implies a medium degree of perceived presence of these skills amongst the youth responded during this research study.

The negative traits at the same time include dealing with failures in Interpersonal Relationship, Critical Thinking and Coping with Emotions. The management graduates responded in this research study perceived that they do not have these skills or the presence of these skills in their personality is to a very low degree. The positive perceived skills can thus be encouraged amongst the sample researched and studied while the negatively perceived life skills can be worked upon so as to imbibe them into the generation Y.

9. Conclusion

The survey analysis augments to nurture seeds to be implanted rather than transported so that leadership qualities are implanted within the soul of the upcoming generation. A leader needs to be possessing life skills to become a true global leader and sustain leadership in nail

biting competitive environment. This certainly appeals for academic –industry interface right from the start of the foundation years. At present our education system is just fostering rote culture which is fabricating 10 pointers but innovatively lack far behind. A 360 degrees change in both outlook and implementation is pertinent for better tomorrow to have visionary leadership qualities in upcoming and present generation.

10. Recommendation

Based on the study as a whole some suggestions to develop life skills

- Stephen Covey in his book “*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*” states-Empathetic listening to understand. This can be developed by effective role plays where listening is required. Half the problem is solved when one listens to analyse and understand the problem.
- Facilitating hands on training to mentors. An updated trained mentor would be in a better position to understand and train the protégées.
- Assignments to be based on daily routine activities like maths problem can be based on calculating weekly budget for groceries, house hold finance as per age.
- Creativity can be shaped by paper games, encouraging leading the group, running a class by democratic means.
- Interpersonal relationships can be developed by having group assignments like cleaning the area, teaching the underprivileged students and solving their problems.
- Autonomy in handling the projects ex CSR events, event management starting from generating, managing finance to execution of the event. This will develop endurance for time & stress management in constricted horizon.
- Interaction & interviews from industry leaders and role models emphasizing their path to success with emphasis on their obstacles to success and feedback on industry expectations right from schooldays.
- Innovative thinking to be appreciated starting from the school days till professional education. Special time should be included in daily time table for this

initiative Positive results should be appreciated with rewards and constructive suggestions in empathetic manner to be given on failure of the idea.

- Lessening the course curriculum to facilitate sound learning in core dimensions which have practicability use.
- Developing the habit of listening to “NO” so that future rejections can be handled easily.
- Mandatory reading habit should be designed especially biographies to develop conceptual ability.
- To instil notion of WIN -WIN by framing exercises and role plays so that attitude of superiority and inferiority wanes away.

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