

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

How to Improve Soft Skills for Vietnamese Students to Boost Their Start-Up Process

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Abstract

The youth is the main labor force for the socio-economic development of each country as this is a strong and young force that accounts for a large proportion of the labor force. However, the unemployment rate among young people is still high, one of the important reasons is that there is no suitable job, or the employment opportunities are still in shortage while the ability to create jobs of the economy is still limited. The solution currently is that the Government has policies to encourage the youth doing startups to create jobs for themselves and others. In particular, students are considered a core youth team in the society, they are fully equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for practical operation. The more important thing is that students will have many ideas formed right from their seats in universities, if they can take advantage of it, they can turn them into business projects to call for capital. But in general, the annual start-up rate in students is not high, the level of success is not much, one of those barriers is the lack of soft skills in starting a business, leading to difficulties in finding capital, partners and market. This study is based on student statistics and surveys and a number of businesses to identify soft skills gaps and how to improve their soft skills to create momentum for startup in new situations. To increase students' soft skills, the efforts of both sides (school and students) should be taken into consideration. For school: necessary to raise the awareness of students about the important role of soft skills; teaching methods in all subjects need to integrate a variety of soft skills to help students practice; paying attention to training foreign language and informatics skills; increasing the amount of discussion and teamwork in the subjects; strengthening extracurricular activities throughout the learning process; searching and providing opportunities for students to attend seminars at home and abroad; increasing the time for training and internship; developing soft skills through mass organizations. For students: being proactive in the process of learning and cultivating yourself; actively and proactively improve soft skills for themselves.

Keywords: Soft skills, students, start-up

1. Introduction

Starting a business is a hot issue now because it can help students to demonstrate their ability and make creative ideas a reality, create jobs for themselves as well as others. According to Clause 2, Article 3 of the Law on Small and Medium Enterprises (2017), starting a business is to implement the idea based on the exploitation of intellectual property, technology, new business models and fast growth. On the side of universities, if students' entrepreneurial opportunities are successfully nurtured, there will be increased job opportunities and self-employment after graduation, these will promote the reputation of the schools in the field of training and attract capable learners to apply when the trend of university autonomy in Vietnam is inevitable.

What role will the school play in promoting students' entrepreneurial motivation - a current trend that is being encouraged by the Government, which is clearly reflected in the Decision No.1982 of Prime Minister (October 18, 2016) issued a National Qualification Framework which defined the output standards of university education: students need to be skilled at leading, starting a business, creating jobs for yourself and for others. However, starting a business is a long-term process that requires graduates to be fully equipped with professional knowledge, necessary skills, and other support resources to create momentum for successful start-up. In particular, "soft" skills are not professional, but not natural; It is due to the fact that the training and self-practice process is accumulated, so that individuals can confidently express themselves in front of the crowd as well as call for investment in their bright ideas. This article is based on sources of statistical data and self-investigation from start-up businesses to explore the role of soft skills with student start-ups - a high-educated core force of youth, the group with the highest successful startup rate. Then there are several implications for stakeholders to enhance soft skills for students, contributing to boost their start-ups in the future.

2. Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data is obtained from published articles, studies, scientific research reports. Primary data is collected through survey of two target groups: i) Case study at the National Economics University: last year students self-evaluate their soft skills with 350 students online; ii) A survey about requirements of enterprises for soft skills of newly graduated students through 95 enterprises in Hanoi and neighboring provinces with 65 enterprises going online and 30 enterprises directly investigating; the respondents were business directors and head of human resources department from April to June 2015 is in need of recruiting and employing trained workers at university level.

Survey forms are designed according to Likert scale with 5 levels: 1 (Very low), 5 (Very high) to assess the level of students' soft skills and the level of demand from businesses. Processing results are determined by average values and compared between these two groups to see the difference between the two sides.

Based on these data, the authors synthesized, analyzed and compared to show the importance of soft skills with the start-up of students - the core force of students, the level of soft skill deficiency compared to practical requirements and ways to overcome to equip students with soft skills, create a chance for successful start-up students in the future.

3. The Role and Characteristics of Soft Skills in the Startup Process

Soft skills are one of the factors to assess human capacity as well as labor quality. Students with soft skills will be the key to success in the startup process. In Wilhelm (2004)'s study, it was shown that when surveying employers' assessments of skills, they ranked soft skills as number one in terms of their initial success for new employees. In fact, for the capacity of new graduates, soft skills are seen as shortages compared to hard skills (Arnold and Davey, 1994; Mullen 1997). Many studies have published the necessary skills for graduates and emphasize the important role of personal attributes rather than technical skills (Liston, 1998; Meade & Andrews, 1995; Weiss, 1999). Soft skills are important subtle skills in human life such as life skills, self-study skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, teamwork skills, and time management skills, relationship-building skills, self-motivating and goal-setting skills,... Different from "hard" skills often appear on resumes such as education level, expertise, experience and professional expertise; then "soft" skills are mainly skills of human character, not professional, not a special personality, simply expressed through communication, how to listen, how to move around and express yourself in front of the crowd, but making an important contribution to maximize your ability, forte, to make your difference compared to others. Proficiency in these skills will enable students to convince investors to fund their projects or persuade customers to accept products and services that are useful to customers - it is essential for startups to survive and grow.

According to Marcel M. Robles (2012), soft skills are a combination of interpersonal skills and human attributes or personalities. He developed the concept of the following formula: Soft skills = behavioral skills among people + human attributes/characteristics. Bunk's (1994) shows that soft skills are made up of each individual's internal skills (self-management; orientation in learning; creativity, flexibility; motivation and situation resolution) and external skills, in other words, skills created in the process of contact between people (teamwork, communication and influence skills; leadership and leadership skills).

According to WB's report (STEP survey), employee' skills include three main skills (cognitive skills, social skills and behavior, technical skills). Cognitive skills include using logical, direct and creative thinking skills; Critical thinking as well as thinking problem solving through existing knowledge. Social and behavioral skills include personal qualities related to success in the labor market such as openness to experience, dedication, and outreach to know how to agree and emotional stability, self-control, perseverance, decision-making skills, personal interaction skills. Technical skills include the ingenuity to use complex tools and equipment, technical skills developed through vocational training or on job and skills related to a particular profession.

Unlike hard skills, professional skills are measurable; unaffected by personality, accurate, applied in certain areas and may become obsolete, soft skills have the following characteristics:

Soft skills are not measurable: Hard skills are often easy to observe and measure because they are technical and specialized in relation to the position of workers (Pool & Sewel, 2007). In contrast, soft skills are difficult to observe and measure because soft skills are often created through the process of changing behavior and consciousness that happens in a process continuously.

Soft skills are not professional skills but support professional skills: If hard skills are necessary conditions, soft skill is sufficient. Hard skills help owners to perform specific tasks, soft skills help increase work efficiency. These two skills will combine to become the core of success.

Soft skills influenced by personality: Personal qualities are an element of soft skills. A person with a positive personality (calm, optimistic, friendly, open ...) will positively affect soft skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, conflict management and teamwork skills.

Soft skills have flexibility: Soft skills do not have a standardized measure. Depending on each subject and situation, soft skills are used differently.

Soft skills are applied and valuable in all areas: Soft skills are needed in this field, and could be good skills if available in other areas, but generally can be applied and always helpful, whether in work or in life.

Soft skills are an ongoing process: Soft skills with continuous improvement are constantly being improved. Own and improve soft skills is a long journey for everyone.

Along with the trend of globalization and international economic integration, soft skills are becoming more and more important in work and start-up process. Klaus (2010) points out that 75% of jobs depend on soft skills while the remaining 25% belongs to knowledge. According to Watts (2008), soft skills determine an 85% success of an individual,

hard skills and other factors account for the remaining 15%. There are also other studies showing this rate is 70% and 30%. Soft skills are not decisive, but they make entrepreneurship more convenient and proactive in all situations. The reasons include:

The degree of equivalence cannot make a difference, soft skills will be the decisive factor. Soft skills will help employees solve problems, give themselves the right to decide, create and take full advantage of opportunities in the start-up process so soft skills bring opportunities and advantages.

Managing yourself will help to set goals and correct orientation. Communication skills will help better interact with colleagues, partners around people, create good working and good social relationships. Thereby, that improves work efficiency - the foundation of success in the start-up process.

Managing yourself, practicing your attitude, professional behavior will form positive habits. Self-management skills such as stress management, conflict control, time management, crisis management, self-care skills, self-management in health issues, would bring a spiritual foundation strong from inside to help young people in the startup process.

Soft skills are the key to making every communication and collaboration more effective. Possessing the ability to build a strong relationship, even for those who have little or no contact, becomes an indispensable requirement for many different roles.

4. Soft Skills Needed in the Start-Up Process

Starting a business is the beginning of a career, but the most common form is to set up a business to do business in a certain field. Starting a business is to establish a business in which you are a manager, founder or co-founder. The provision of new products, new services or even sales of items already on the market but according to their own ideas, are called startups. Starting a business can be a process of creating a new field of your own. Thereby you can hire employees to work for you and you are the manager of your company or business. Starting a business brings a lot of value to yourself as well as many benefits for society and workers. In the fact, the start-up ideas are formed mainly by young people who are passionate about getting rich and creative, especially those who are going to school or just graduated. These young people are full of enthusiasm, they also have enough agility, the ability to grasp new knowledge and technology, have the courage and the desire to assert them more than their predecessors wear. Although the previous ones have more experience advantages. Important factors that starters need to have: Creative ability: The first and most important factor when starting your enrichment path is that you must have a tremendous creativity. Because only creativity makes the difference between you and your opponent, only more creative people can help you see through the entire market today, finding unmet needs, from then on, make your own business plan. This plan does not necessarily include unknown business ideas or new ideas that are completely unthinkable, but it must create a breakthrough and a competitive advantage for your business. The difference in products and services you provide is an important fulcrum for you in this fiercely competitive market. So, instead of competing for a piece of cake with the big competitors in the market born earlier, stronger and more experienced than us, we can find a new piece of cake - at which we are the leader.

Business start-up capital: One of the other important factors when you want to start a business is business start-up capital. This is a source of nurturing your business plan and a leverage for your success. Perseverance: The persistence is an important factor because in the start-up process, not everyone can succeed in the first time they start working, there are people who fail many times but they still don't give up, continue to stand up to implement their ideas. It is the determination and perseverance in that person that has created their later success as the saying: "Failure is a successful mother." In fact, the fact has shown that successful entrepreneurs are those with higher determination than ordinary people to overcome obstacles, have passion and persistence than people to stand up from losses and defeat in a short time.

Basic knowledge and expertise: Now you want to do anything in any industry you need to have knowledge of that profession. So if you want to start a business in a field, you should also learn carefully the knowledge around that area. For example, if you want to start a business by opening a recording studio for singers, you need to have basic knowledge in music, mix music and know how to use some basic instruments,... or do you want to become a big fashion merchant you need to have basic knowledge of fashion trends, sales,... Understanding of basic knowledge, expertise in our field of operation or many different aspects of business such as product, human resources, technology, market, related legal documents system is an important step to help you avoid failure in lack of expertise and unintended reasons. So if you intend to start a business, please fully equip yourself with this knowledge.

Marketing research skills: Marketing research will provide entrepreneurs with important information about the market sector that they operate. In addition, this helps start a business plan and adapt to the future market.

Financial management skills: This is an extremely important skill for entrepreneurs. The start-up process will need a certain amount of money to build facilities, invest human resources while not being able to operate to get immediate revenue. Therefore, it is necessary to have an economical and reasonable spending plan right from the beginning as well as during the later development process of the enterprise.

Authorization skills: Authorization involves the allocation of responsibilities to people to accomplish work. The ideal condition you want to achieve is when your employees can do all the daily activities in your business. Delegating effectively will help achieve a balance between effective management and the effectiveness of work performance. The key factor is knowing how to get your business to work for you, rather than trying to follow your business process.

Strategic planning skills: Strategic planning is a very important activity in business. It is the process of determining your company's strategy or direction and deciding the allocation of capital as well as personnel. The secret is to know how to anticipate your company's future performance from the next 3 to 5 years with a detailed business plan.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, your own soft skills such as time management, emotional management, communication skills, are also one of the indispensable factors. Soft skills do not mean a decisive factor for the success or

failure of an enterprise, but it is a supportive factor that helps increase the likelihood of success for your start-up process and create the initiative for your business in difficult situations may be encountered.

Survey of 197 votes for officials who directly manage graduates of National Economics University within 1-2 years. Subjects of the survey are required to provide detailed scores on the ability to apply specific skills of graduates who are graduates in the first time at the unit, as well as assess the importance of the Soft skills for successful career (1: most important to 10: least important) show that students who have a successful start-up need to have soft skills like table 1.

Number	Skill	Rate (%)	Rank
1	Teamwork skills	75.5	2
2	Creative thinking skills	52.0	4
3	Self-motivating skills	28.6	8
4	Self-management skills	59.2	3
5	Leadership skills	6.6	10
6	Relationship building skills	34.7	7
7	Communication skills	85.7	1
8	Self-study skills	51.0	5
9	Problem solving and decision making skills	42.9	6
10	Global thinking skills	7.1	9

Table 1: Soft Skills That Businesses Require / Wish Graduates Must Necessarily Have When Recruited to Work

Source: Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2016), Survey Of Employers' Requirements on Soft Skills for Newly Graduated Bachelors from NEU In Economics and Business Administration

There are three most important soft skills when approaching a job ranked: communication skills (listening actively and understanding information; speaking clearly and concisely; negotiating issues; communicating nonverbal effective language (proper body language, proper, eye contact, smile,...), teamwork skills (implementing personal responsibility and commitment to the group; promoting group goals; creating motivation for other members, initiating and sharing experiences) and creative thinking skills (the ability to recognize the need for a new approach, new ideas; the ability to actively modify the a modern approach, the ability to create new concepts, the ability to nurture creativity or practice creativity). Joining groups, being a volunteer, using social network, attending every meeting... is the way for young entrepreneurs to start expanding their network of contacts and seek opportunities. These skills help to broaden the relationships for many to know. The company's products also have opportunities to seek personnel when needed. The ranking above ensures the performance of the work without mentioning the factors of work experience or other factors from individuals as well as job characteristics.

To better explain the importance of soft skills with startups, based on the survey data of the research group with 95 businesses and 350 students. The results of comparing skills between requirements and reality are shown in Table 2. The surveyed enterprises all affirmed: one of the basic causes that graduates do not find a job properly training or not finding a job, or being unable to succeed is due to a lack of skills and especially soft skills. Managers say that graduates are a force of young, enthusiastic workers but have no work experience and especially do not know how to prove themselves to potential partners.

Number	Skill	Requirements of Enterprises	Skills of Students
1	Communication and behavior skills	3.98	3.43
2	Presentation skills	3.75	3.62
3	Relationship establishment skills	3.89	3.67
4	Teamwork skill	3.78	3.65
5	Planning and organizing skills	3.91	3.64
6	Skills ready to learn and self-study	3.81	3.73
7	Creative thinking skills	3.84	3.53
8	Problem-solving skills	3.81	3.69
9	Leadership skills	3.54	3.12
10	Skills to adapt to the changing environment	4.15	3.86

Table 2: Comparison of the Difference between the Requirements of Enterprises and the Soft Skills Accumulated By Students

Source: Vu Thi Uyen and Colleagues (2015), Surveying Enterprises' Requirements and Level of Soft Skills of Graduate Students

Thus, although the soft skills of the surveyed students are relatively high, in general, they do not meet the requirements of enterprises. In particular, many students have graduated but still do not have a career orientation in accordance with individual market and market demands, lack of professional skills and qualities, and are confused when applying the theory to reality and weak; being poor in foreign languages, especially foreign languages that directly relate to the professional field. As successful business owners, the recognition of "soft" skill requirements is rooted in the reality of business operations, so if students do not meet soft skills besides other requirements, it is really a barrier for startups.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Along with Vietnam's deeply international economic integration trend, the labor market for university graduates is not only national but also regional and international. That brings both opportunities and challenges for them. If the graduates themselves are equipped with updated "hard" skills according to the practical requirements that require the university to pay more attention, it is necessary to pay attention to the soft skills for students so that they can confidently enter the volatile labor market, ensuring that the national qualification framework regulates the output standards of university qualifications approved by the Prime Minister. In order to enhance soft skills for students not only from the training schools but also from the learners themselves, it is necessary to recognize this in order to enhance the ability to find suitable jobs in organizations / businesses or start-up business to "self-employed", turning your own business ideas into reality contributes to solving the unemployment of the group of adults with university or higher levels of training, including as follow:

5.1. On The Side of the School, the Following Aspects Should Be Considered

Firstly, it is necessary to raise the awareness of students studying at the school about the important role and necessity of soft skills in future work. The school and student management units should have published rankings about the necessity of soft skills for each industry group in the enrollment information for each discipline and emphasized right from the session. Early political activities to direct students right from the start of school.

Secondly, teaching methods in all subjects need to integrate a variety of soft skills to help students practice. Skills to solve problems or leadership skills can be applied in case study exercises. Organize games to train negotiating skills and communication skills. Accordingly, it is necessary to set up a schedule to present presentation skills to students right from the first year and enhance the presentation time in other subjects so that all students have the opportunity to practice. This course can train students to be confident in front of many people; help improve communication skills, including learning and practicing how to use body language, body language, improve communication with colleagues, customers, friends, superiors after approaching and take on the actual work.

Thirdly, paying attention to training foreign language and informatics skills for students and encouraging students to self-study more certificates to prepare for themselves when they graduate. Accordingly, the school needs to take English proficiency tests in strict accordance with the foreign language output standards (whether students register for a foreign language at school, or self-study at outside centers with a certificate, they also need to take the school's exam), to avoid the situation that students who have a certificate that is not in their capacity can affect the reputation of the training institution.

Fourthly, increase the amount of discussion and teamwork in the subjects. This activity would help students understand how to exchange ideas in groups, accumulate exploration skills and gather information in conflict resolution. Thereby, students can also discover their own qualities to develop executive and leadership skills.

Fifthly, strengthen extracurricular activities throughout the learning process. Students should be encouraged and oriented to choose and voluntarily participate in collective activities, exchange in and out of school, picnic, movement and volunteer activities (in which the role of academic advisor, organizing a very important youth and student union) in accordance with the preferences and learning schedule of each student. At the same time, the departments should encourage students to establish and promote activities of English clubs, young entrepreneurs, future managers, ... in accordance with the nature of each specialty to create complementary playgrounds, useful in full-time students. Clubs need to have a guideline for the purpose of operation, to provide a requirement for members to join, to call for funding from alumni, to conduct activities once a month with very practical topics related to students' study and career after graduation. Through this experience, it not only brings hours of enjoyment and recess outside the classroom hours but also facilitates students to develop soft skills such as thinking, problem solving, reflexes and creativity, ... as the foundation for later work.

Sixthly, search and provide opportunities for students to attend seminars at home and abroad through cooperative programs, exchange students on summer occasions. In addition, it can be seminars to exchange information about career opportunities from domestic and international businesses so that students have the opportunity to exchange, contact and understand the wishes of employers. That would help them identify what they need to gain the lightening opportunity.

Seventhly, increase the time for training and internship at enterprises right from the early years of large and multinational economic groups to help students understand more about the practice of industries, accumulate experience. Test and create a mark on your resume. This activity greatly contributes to significantly shortening the gap between theory and practice to meet employers' requirements.

Eighthly, developing soft skills through mass organizations: building emulation movements to train students in academic and literary and sports competitions, thereby helping students to experience pre-crowd presentation skills, teamwork skills and leadership skills through direct organization of the program; developing club model according to interests such as English club, art team, scientific research club; periodically organize conferences, seminars on exchanges and lies about topics of interest to students, exchanges with businesses and people of great influence; deployment of

intensive soft skills classes; organizing volunteer activities, through practical volunteer programs in the locality, maximizing the teamwork skills and communication skills, behavior of dealing with many different people .

5.2. *Students Themselves Need to Be Aware and Act in Their Own Ways as Follows*

Firstly, it is necessary to be proactive in the process of learning and cultivating yourself, considering learning for yourself rather than for others. From the stage of choosing schools, choosing majors, students themselves also need to have clear opinions according to the direction of their future career, their ability and not too much influence from the impact from the side relatives and entry points according to the standards of the departments. When choosing a major to study, it is necessary to prepare the future according to the profession, ignoring the thought of "the grass is always greener on the other side of the hills", thereby helping students maintain the motivation to study and strive and explore, seize opportunities to express themselves in every situation. They must actively take the initiative in participating in the classes and learning events at the school, avoiding the situation that many students go to class only to take attendance for names without paying attention to the lecture, affecting the equipped with professional knowledge and developing logical thinking, self-discipline right from the school chair. Moreover, students must be aware of the need to participate in scientific research activities organized by the school every year to develop creative thinking, know how to apply theory into practice, and develop their reputation when they receive awards for honors from scientific research. At the same time, students need to know how to plan a reasonable time allocation between their main study time and extra classes (supplementing with foreign language, computer,), participating in volunteer activities and extra work to earn extra income. Accordingly, students need to determine the most important thing is to study based on the framework of the school program built to graduate on schedule, other activities are only complementary; avoid luxury status in supporting activities without passing the exam or passing exams but with low results. It further discourages the will of self-striving and reduces the chances of getting a valuable job when you graduate.

Secondly, actively and proactively improve soft skills for themselves. In order to improve the chances of getting a job right after graduating through recruiting or starting a business, students themselves need to actively seize opportunities for themselves right from their seat in school, through internships and internships at organizations/businesses. Therefore, each student needs to understand his personality and identify his strengths and weaknesses in order to make his own action plan to supplement his gaps and learn to control himself through the supervise the reality or decide to find a short course on skills training for students organized by the school (this is an optional elective). He himself always keeps a positive and progressive attitude, learns lessons from my own stumbling blocks to find ways to overcome with specific actions, modifies behavior to improve himself; always practices how to express himself in accordance with his personality, shows others his abilities and attracts them to his strengths. Moreover, it is necessary to know how to express listening and capture more information through learning how to interpret, demonstrating a focus on conversations, showing respect for the other person speaking, recording the main idea and wait for your turn to comment. Practice how to evaluate and recognize other people's opinions, how to make suggestions so that others can improve but do not bother to make progress. Therefore, students should always actively participate in conversations, discussions at home, at school, and outside society to accumulate life experiences.

In addition, every student is self-conscious about having to study well and know how to use a foreign language well (currently English is still the best choice for himself), besides solid professional knowledge, facilitating good work in the global environment. Because of the fact that many students still have the idea of learning a foreign language to deal with and do not spend much time on this. Or some students follow the trend, learn foreign languages according to their preferences (at the same time learning from 2 to 3 foreign languages but only in the form of riding horses to see flowers, not apply to the professional they pursue). This makes it difficult for you to work in foreign businesses afterwards, or if you are sent abroad by an enterprise. They must take advantage of every opportunity to practice clear communication, both in spoken language (using the right grammar, avoiding lisp) and body language (body language). In communicative situations, you need to know how to choose and use the appropriate language and promote your ability to use foreign languages, especially English - because most employers still require a high level of English. Therefore, every student should know how to grasp the opportunity to talk in front of the crowd to gain confidence (in fact many students at the school participate in group discussions but are afraid and do not want to attend the presentation - this is the most accessible society to practice communication skills).

With the learning process at school, students themselves need to take advantage of every opportunity to accumulate social knowledge for themselves. This is a very important issue for students in the field of economics and business administration. In addition to acquiring knowledge through lectures and books at school, students need to actively consult information on social issues, current issues, etc. in the country and internationally through reading newspapers, magazines, and tracking news or other topics. At the same time, care about developing leadership and decision-making skills through the willingness to take on leadership roles as a group leader, leading a small seminar on a problem students find favoring; or managing sporting events; volunteer leader in student clubs, in the classroom, or at the residence. Practical experience will make students see the difference between thinking and acting to develop their skills. With the energy and enthusiasm, students need to be interested in discovering new knowledge and constantly innovating, giving new ideas and experimenting to the extent possible; attach importance to expanding relationships and connecting with people around them but always expressing their own personal identities, having right-minded ideas, not imitating, learning to ask others - with efforts to give up certain beliefs After graduation, students will be equipped with enough equipment to step by step and achieve success in starting a business.

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