

Review of Student Soft Skills Development Using the 5Ws/H Approach Resulting in a Realistic, Experiential, Applied, Active Learning and Teaching Pedagogical Classroom

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Abstract

This conceptual paper employs the 5Ws/H questioning approach to examine and review what is currently understood about soft skills development in our business students. The ‘what’ question provides information on what are the definitional differences between hard and soft skills. The ‘why’ question examines why soft skills are important to four societal constituents interested in soft skills. The ‘where’ question tries to ascertain the types of academic and/or organizational environments that could teach soft skills. The ‘when’ question offers information relative to the amount of time that would be needed to teach soft skills. The ‘who’ question evaluates whether university faculty or professional trainers/corporate managers should be teaching the development of soft skills. The ‘how’ question identifies different methods of developing soft skills and highlights what is wrong with our current approach to developing soft skills in our classrooms. The paper concludes with a classroom approach for soft skills development that offers a continuous realistic, experiential, applied, active classroom teaching and learning approach.

***Keywords:** Soft Skills, Learning Theories, Experimental-Active Classrooms*

Introduction

Student soft skills development is complex and imposes several challenges. Beyond accessing what soft skills are, answering other key questions including why soft skills development should happen, where it might happen, when it might occur, who might make it happen, and how it might happen is one way of addressing the challenges of student soft skills development. From my faculty member’s perspective, the biggest challenge may be the ongoing pedagogical challenge of how to teach soft skills in a manner that is contextually relevant and realistic. This paper attempts to provide a framework of six major questions I use with partial answers to promote insightful classroom pedagogy for my student soft skills development. It is hoped that future dialogue and discussions about soft skills development in our students will continue as a result of this paper’s conceptual presentation.

The technique I used to spur creative thinking and to flush out and develop potential discourse on this developmental concern was to use a checklist of 5Ws/H questions (Martin, 2016), which draws on Rudyard Kipling’s poem Six Honest Serving Men—what, why, when, how, where and who (Kipling, 2007). The specific questions I addressed were ‘what’ are soft skills; ‘why’ soft skills are important to a variety of societal constituents; ‘where’ in terms of academic classrooms and/or organizational workplace environments should soft skills

development take place; ‘when’ is the best time to provide these development environments; ‘who’, in terms of university faculty or workplace trainers, might provide these development environments; and ‘how’ have different types of soft skills development/methods been provided and what criticisms and future pedagogical methods might be taken to help blunt these criticisms.

The ‘What’ Question: Hard Versus Soft Skills

Generally, the skills mix that higher education institutions, employers, students, and faculty are interested in include hard (technical) skills and soft (non-technical) skills. Hard skills refer to the technical, tangible, measurable competencies believed to be valuable in the workplace (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniac, 2016). For example, have students learned the principles of accounting or principles of supply chain management?

Soft skills are those non-technical competencies connected to one's personality, attitude, ability, and motivation to interact effectively with others (Cooke & Zaby, 2015; Stewart et al., 2016). They include oral and written communication skills, teamwork skills, decision making/problem solving/critical thinking skills, ethical judgment/moral integrity/professional responsibility skills, social/diversity awareness and sensitivity skills, leadership skills, time and stress management skills, innovation/creativity/negotiation skills, interpersonal relationships skills adaptability/self-motivation skills, and willingness to learn skills (Bolli & Renold, 2017; Chatteraj & Shabnam, 2015; Mishra, 2014; Seth & Seth, 2013; Stewart, Wall & Marciniac, 2016). They represent the interpersonal skills needed to handle one's ability to manage oneself and one's interaction with others (Laker & Powell, 2011).

They require high levels of emotional/social intelligence, language ability, and training in the art of persuasion (Cialdini, 2012). Given the historical changes in workplace skill demands (e.g., MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017), these skills are included as part of employability skills (e.g., Harun, Salleh, Baharom, & Memon, 2017; Nisha & Rajasekaran, 2018), job readiness skills (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017), or responsible management principles/skills (Nonet, Kassel, & Meijs, 2016).

A number of surveys have examined soft skills. The National Association of College and Educators surveyed employers to find out what they looked for in a candidate's resume and their top five soft skills were leadership, teamwork, written communications, problem-solving and verbal communication (NACE, 2016). Hart Research Associates also surveyed employers and found verbal communications, teamwork, written communications, ethical judgment and decision making, and critical/analytical thinking/reasoning as the top five most important skills when hiring college grads (Hart Research Associates, 2015). The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) found five skills employers believed college graduates lacked to be professionalism/work ethic, relationship building/soft skills, business acumen, written communications, and critical thinking/problem-solving with leadership being number six and teamwork being number eight (SHRM, 2015).

Cooke and Zaby (2015) also highlighted a number of studies that suggest business graduates lack a number of essential soft skills for entering the workplace. Jones, Baldi, Phillips

and Waikar (2016) surveyed what organizational recruiters were looking for in business graduates. The top four characteristics of having a positive attitude, being respectful of others, being trustworthy, honest and ethical, and finally, taking initiative are reflective of soft skills.

The ‘Why’ Question: Soft Skill Constituents

The ‘why’ question essentially asks me why I should be concerned about student soft skill development. Partial answers to this question come from a number of different sources that include the purposes of higher education, organizational employers, university students, and university faculty.

Why Source: The Purposes of Higher Education

Higher education can be characterized as a political struggle between three main competing purposes: democratic equality, social efficiency, or social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Higher education in our American colleges and universities seems to have reduced our emphasis on democratic equality and concentrated more on social efficiency and social mobility (Fein, 2014; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014; Singh, 2014; White, 2013).

The goal of democratic equality was to produce a populace of well-informed and engaged citizens (Saichaie & Morpew, 2014; Singh, 2014). Higher education was originally viewed as a facilitator or contributor to the pursuit of knowledge about the quality of democratic life and democratic processes (Biesta, 2007). Higher education institutions were viewed as socially accountable institutions that have to deliver social benefits through their core functions (Singh, 2014). However, White (2013) argues that this approach has been undermined by student fee increases, fiscal austerity, and accountability mechanisms.

The erosion of civic ties via the democratic equality approach has been replaced by the goal of trying to provide efficient training for future employment in the social efficiency approach (Fein, 2014; Labaree, 1997; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014; Waldow, 2015; White, 2013). Higher education institutions are now viewed as economic engines for society whose primary goal is to produce skilled workers. This approach focused on educating productive workers for the public good (Singh, 2014) so that they are economically productive members of their community (Labaree, 1997; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014; White, 2013). Labaree (1997) describes this approach as vocationalism, implying that students attend higher educational institutions for the purpose of preparing themselves for a vocation by acquiring requisite technical job skills.

In the social mobility approach, students are to be provided with credentials and skills that enhance their individual position to make career-oriented financial and social gains (Labaree, 1997). This is representative of a career-oriented outcome and associated with the pursuit of a professional credential to obtain employee professionalism and increase their employability (Fein, 2014; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014). This professionalization or credentializing process means that students would have to incorporate a corpus of technical knowledge with which few others have familiarity and would do so in a socialization manner that transforms their self-images (Fein, 2014). Today higher educational institutions now seem to emphasize their educational role as levers for individual economic advancement and social

enjoyment rather than as broader instruments for generating public knowledge for improving communities and society (Fein, 2014; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014; White, 2013).

However, and as the previous employer-based surveys have indicated, recent college graduates seem deficient in the soft skills of professionalism and socialization mannerisms even though 96% of a Gallup poll of chief academic officers rated their institution as "very/somewhat effective" in preparing their students for the work world (Jaschik, 2014).

Why Source: Organizational Employers

Employers are the ultimate customers of our educational system. Until students get reality-based about what it really means to be adequately prepared to perform responsibilities and obligations exceptionally well and have realistic expectations about what surviving and helping their organization be ready to compete in this maneuverable, highly uncertain and competitive world, employers can be very significant losers given the inadequate preparation of the soft skills of our students who become their employees.

The gap between what employers want as soft skills in college graduates and what college graduates have is often significant. A Gallup-Lumina poll of 623 U.S. business leaders revealed that only 11% of these leaders agreed that today's college graduates possess the skills business required (Busteed, 2014). PayScales survey of 63,924 managers and 14,167 recent college graduates found that 60% of those managers said critical thinking and problem solving were the soft skills most lacking in college graduates followed closely by communications (PayScale, 2016). Finally, in a 2015 Hart Research survey of 400 employers, fewer than 3 in 10 thought graduates were prepared, especially in critical thinking and written and oral communication skills (Hart Research Associates, 2015).

Miller (2017) indicated that higher education needs to focus on more than just the transfer of technical knowledge and skills. He suggested that it also becomes necessary to take on the responsibility for shaping the workplace attitudes, behaviors, and motivations that college graduates take into their workplace. Without these soft skills, college graduates and workplace employers will be unprepared for the challenges both will face. Attention now turns to an examination of current students' classroom attitudes, behaviors, and motivations that might impact their potential employability and workplace demeanor.

Why Source: University Students

The students now being taught in our higher educational institutions are generally referred to as Millennials. As with any prior generations of students, Millennials have both good and poor attitudes, behaviors, and other defining characteristics. They are described as confident, multi-taskers, team-oriented, achieving, self-reliant, independent, goal-oriented, the most techno savvy of all preceding generations, and dislike inflexible work schedules that control them (Comperatore & Nerone, 2008; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, & Kuron, 2012; Yee & Muthu, 2011; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). This generation seeks security and safety, continuous upgrading of their technical prowess, and

continual reinforcement from their managers, thus, making them a high maintenance group to supervise once in the workforce.

These Millennial students consistently ranked themselves as prepared in key soft skills such as oral communications, written communications, critical and creative thinking, and teamwork (GMAC, 2014). Furthermore, in a 2015 Hart Research survey of 613 college students, 74% of the students indicated that their higher education institution had done an effective job preparing them to have the soft skills necessary for workplace success. It is only after entering the workforce that they recognize the importance of acquiring these critical soft skills and once in the workforce, they may find their organization offering minimal or no training for developing these soft skills.

An inordinate number of students have acquired the following attitudes, behaviors, and other characteristics that potentially put them at risk in either obtaining high employability (Thomas, Bierman, & Powers, 2011) or developing the soft skills needed for long-career success (Asik-Dizdar, 2015; Cooke & Zaby, 2015; Tasto, Randolph, & Cullen, 2016). These students have a feeling of entitlement to an academic degree without having to do the hard work to learn and master the academic subject matter they need to have for successful careers; lack motivation and self-discipline or work ethic; exhibit high levels of narcissism and classroom incivility along with disruptive student behaviors (reading newspapers during class, studying for other classes, arriving late or leaving early, using electronic devices); place blame on others (mainly their instructors) for their own lack of academic success; expect instant gratification, constant feedback and reassurance, along with well-defined and clear structure about what they are expected to do performance-wise; lack proper formal and face-to-face communication skills and who, because of “helicoptering parents,” lack independence and basic thinking and decision making skills (Angeline, 2011; Baker, Comer, & Martinak, 2008; Comperatore & Nerone, 2008; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Lancaster & Stillman, 2010; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009; Somer, 2007; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013).

After graduating from college, our former students attempt to find permanent employment and/or pursue a career and because of their unrealistic expectations and desire for instant gratification, they get crushed when they have to face the reality that the organization they work for expects work ethic performance based on its terms, not on their terms (Luthy, Padgett, & Toner, 2009). Unless a country’s educational system and its culture prepares students to effectively compete in its workforce as the fundamental social efficiency and social mobility purposes mandate, the country’s productivity will eventually decline with unfortunate consequences for its economy and its societal standard of living (Miller & Slocombe, 2012).

Why Source: Says University Faculty

Leadership, in general, is defined as the purposeful and rational process of influencing others toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals (Yukl, 2013). University faculty need to become better leaders and managers of their classrooms since they provide the actual leadership in the classroom and their behaviors impact a variety of student outcomes (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Minter, 2011; Pounder, 2008; Stein, 2014). Stein (2014) suggested that faculty who are leaders feel it is important to know what motivates their students, but faculty who function only

as managers do not need such information because they focus primarily on short-term outcomes needed to demonstrate some degree of academic technical subject matter competency. Minter (2011) suggested that faculty may not perceive their roles to be that of a classroom manager/leader, but, in fact, they perform these roles every time they are in the classroom and consequently, the duality of leadership and management concepts should apply to their classroom environments. Thus, I feel hard and soft skills development is what our education institutions are supposed to supply in our society. Faculty are at the forefront in attempting to provide the training and development of these skills and this is a responsibility that has apparently not been overly successful—at least from a soft skills developmental effort (Asik-Dizdar, 2015; Tasto et al., 2016).

The ‘Where’ Question: Academic Classrooms or Workplaces

Soft skills development could occur in different learning and/or training environments. Different environments where training and learning of soft skills could take place could include pre-university or university or organizational work-applied, on-site environments (Bolli & Renold, 2016; Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin, & Bakare, 2017; Zuber-Skerritt & Abraham, 2016).

Perhaps the most notable educational, pre-college developmental environment has been the specialized secondary schools focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), usually referred to as STEM Academies (Borowczak, 2015; Borrego & Henderson, 2014; Kasza & Slater, 2017). In these academies, student cohorts, community involvement, internships, capstone projects are utilized throughout the entire K-20 curriculum to help students improve their problem solving/engineering design process and their soft skills such as collaboration, communication, presentation skills, and time management (Kasza & Slater, 2017).

Lerman (2013) identifies an array of skill-enhancing and employment-enhancing U.S. services utilized in our youth education and training programs. One program, the National Guard Youth ChalleNge is a well-developed program for at-risk, out-of-school youth where discipline, teamwork, leadership, job skills, academic excellence, and responsible citizenship are emphasized. The Jobs Corps is a second residential training program offering counseling and training in social skills. Career academies, a third type of training program, operate within regular high schools and are organized around an occupational or industry focus. They form partnerships with employers and local colleges, thereby giving more exposure to job shadowing, career fairs, instructions on how to look for a job, prepare a resume and perform in an interview. Internships, standard apprenticeships as well as youth apprenticeships, offer other career-focused and soft skills development environments.

As students enter college, classrooms utilizing case studies, role-plays, business games, group discussions and class projects, and outward-bound training, as well as specific soft skills development courses have been used to help build confidence in students and enhance their employability (Rao, 2014; 2015). Many universities/colleges have specific semester-long courses devoted to specific soft skill development. These courses might include development of oral and written communications skills through a speech class or a communications class; development of collaboration or teamwork soft skills through a collaborative class or a management of teams

class; development of problem solving/decision making skills through a decision making class, or development of leadership skills through an organization behavior-leadership class.

Examples of international and specific discipline-focused soft skill developmental classroom environments include use of flipped-instructional-design-inter-professional education course for health education students in Canada (Birnbaum, Gretsinger, & Ellis, 2017) and in the UK (Hutchings & Quinney, 2015); use of case studies to transfer soft skills to South African accounting students (Keevy, 2016); use of an educational game to develop soft skills in accounting classrooms in South Africa (Viviers, Fouché, & Reitsma, 2016); use of global virtual teams in logistics and supply chain management in the U.S. and international classrooms (Trautrim, Defee, & Farris, 2016); use of research internships to improve the written and oral communication and critical thinking skills of agricultural majors (Marsh et al., 2016); or the use of game theory-based simulations and AI concepts focusing on the cognitive and emotional learning skills of undergraduate American and Greek students (Sintov et al., 2017; Stavroulia, Makri-Bostsari, Psycharis, & Kekkeris, 2016).

On-the-job workplace soft skills training environments are usually provided by organizations to their employees. These training environments represent an organization's way to help employees develop their soft skills and are attempts to address the soft skills gap left unfilled by our educational institutions. Unique equine-assisted learning (EAL) programs are being used to try to help fulfill the requirements Millennials seek for bridging the gap between older managers and themselves (Meola, 2016). This unique program is an experimental approach to learning using horses in which the facilitator is to help translate the feedback the horse is giving and to prompt the client to think about his or her own habits, styles, and preconceived ideas of leadership and communication.

Situational judgment tests (SJT) is also a unique workplace training environment that uses active learning and structured feedback to enhance procedural and declarative knowledge of the employee (Cox, Barron, Davis, & Garza, 2017). SJT training differs from the traditional case method study by outlining specific alternative actions beforehand (as identified and evaluated by subject matter experts) to allow professional trainers to provide more detailed immediate feedback.

The 'When' Question: During Academic or Workplace Training

Essentially, the 'when' question is concerned with which soft skills can best be learned in universities and which soft skills can be better acquired in the workplace (e.g., Bolli & Renold, 2017) or alternatively, when does informal learning in educational environments favor the more informal learning environments associated with workplace, on-site environments (Becker & Bish, 2017).

The research on the optimal choice of when soft skills should be taught is sparse. Bolli and Renold (2016), in a study of Swiss students and employees, distinguished twelve processes into management processes, business processes, overlapping processes, and supporting processes having respective hard and soft skills. The results of this study suggest that the workplace has a comparative advantage in terms of most soft skills. However, skills used in business process

strategic management, human resource management, organizational design, and project management are most suitable to be taught in school.

Becker and Bish (2017), in a case study about Australian managers in a nonprofit organization, examined the extent to which managers attributed their current level of management skills to formal educational learning or informal, on-site informal learning. Results indicated that a large part of a manager's current management skills were acquired through informal means, but there was a desire for formal (school) learning to complement their informal learning. Specifically for 'when' soft skills development might occur, there seems to be no clear answer. Both types of training environments seem to offer various advantages.

The 'Who' Question: University Faculty or Workplace Trainers

The final 'W'-related question asks 'who' is best to teach soft skills development. This is a question asking me if university faculty or on-site, organizational professional trainers/company managers are best equipped to teach soft skills development. As with the prior question, this question remains an 'open' question relative to overall soft skills development. I could surmise that university faculty in specific skills classes such as communications, decision making, teamwork, or leadership would have the most comprehensive expertise about the respective soft skill. However, the need to cover a wide range of both hard and soft skills may preclude their concentrating on providing adequate and continuous training on specific soft skills. Furthermore, their academic preparation without exposure to realistic workplace culture and experiences may not lead to overall comprehensive student soft skill development.

On the other hand, corporate managers and professional trainers may have the knowledge of corporate culture and daily exposure and experience of working with employees who need more soft skills development. Given the other responsibilities of corporate managers and/or the length of time elapsed for professional trainers after graduating with their certification and/or education, these individuals may not be up to date on the latest and most effective soft skills development methods.

The 'How' Question And the 'What's Wrong' Corollary Question

With all the soft skills development efforts and resources involving multiple constituents, our business students still seem somewhat deficient in learning and demonstrating soft skills. All the previously-mentioned constituents—higher educational institutional administrators and faculty (even primary and secondary institutional administrators and faculty), employers, the international community, and even many students themselves—realize the need to possibly change soft skills teaching, learning, and development methods.

Because business operations and the students who will become eventual employees of these organizations face fast-moving, turbulent, and changing environments in a global-oriented future, business student soft skills development methods have become discipline focused and universally adopted across the world as evidenced by previous citations under the 'when' and 'where' questions.

A variety of different methods about how to teach and develop student soft skills have previously been cited, but the verdict seems to be that our developmental methods still fall short. Suggestions that lack of adequate student soft skills development methods represented one of our educational failures goes back several decades (e.g., MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017), contributed to the skills gap in the U.S. workforce (Christo-Baker, Sindone, & Roper, 2017), may have represented one of the largest contributing factors to the decline of the American worker's global competitiveness (Lerman, 2013), and may not have guaranteed professional readiness, especially in accounting curriculums (Keevyk, 2016; Viviers et al., 2016).

The corollary question to the 'how' question attempts to address 'what's wrong' with our past efforts to develop soft skills in our students and are there future classroom pedagogical methods that I could utilize to increase the teaching, learning and development of soft skills in my business students?

However, in order to address this corollary question, I find it pertinent to consider some of the conclusions reached regarding soft skills development methods. First, there seems to be broad consensus that soft skills development should take place before students graduate, but there is a lack of consensus as to how or where (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017). Within a student's degree program (assuming it's four to five years), soft skills training should be incorporated in the whole curriculum and spread over the whole time of the matriculation (Renuga & Ezhilan, 2014).

A second conclusion is that a lack of student understanding of workplace context and its skills demand may cause a soft skills gap (Apparaju, 2016). To practice and develop desirable soft skills is helped when students have the opportunity to work in real-time-real-world situational contexts and working in internships and other experiential practices helps reduce this type of gap (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017).

A third conclusion is that the challenges of a changing and dynamic economic environment requires a multi-pronged soft skills development approach involving multiple constituents including public and private sectors as well as educational and professional training forces (Christo-Baker et al., 2017).

A fourth conclusion, which is primarily discussed in the HRD literature, is that soft skills are significantly less likely to transfer from training to the job than hard-skills training (Laker & Powell, 2011). These authors also indicated that people receiving training in soft skills were more likely to be adversely affected more than those people receiving training in hard skills by a number of different characteristics.

One difference applicable to my business students is their prior learning and experience relative to soft skills. The previous review of my Millennial students indicated that they have greater prior experience and negative reactions to many of the realistic soft skills they will face in the workplace.

Again, relative to my business students, is a second difference. They seem to have a high degree of resistance to learning realistic workplace soft skills and instead rely on their technical

proWess to get them through handling their interactions with others. A reference to management graduates has been the criticism that they have primarily been greedy, self-interested, materialistic individuals looking to maximize their own benefit (Asik-Dizdar, 2015). This conclusion seemed to be supported by the continued emphasis on the hard skills approach taken by the social mobility and social efficiency purposes of higher education institutions (Laker & Powell, 2011).

A fifth conclusion is that many of the previously-mentioned pedagogical methods represented sporadic, non-continuous developmental events, especially in classroom methods utilizing single role plays, single simulations, single case analysis, end-of-term client-based projects, or listening to invited outside speakers. However, there are some longer, continuous pedagogical methods including semester-long internships, staying with STEM-based Academies through ones primary and secondary education, and some organizational 6-month training programs Even the specialized college classes in communication, collaboration, team-building, decision making or leadership have a continuous semester exposure for the student.

A final conclusion which is directly applicable to me as classroom faculty is how I deal with student learning dynamics. In the past, students were accustomed to a passive classroom learning approach that had a heavy reliance on the traditional lecture and test taking only protocol. This learning strategy was employed solely due to time constraints, thus reducing the strategy to employ alternative learning strategies (Randolph & Cullen, 2016; Riordan, Hine, & Smith, 2017).

The active learning approach along with recognizing the value of realistic clinical teaching and experiential applied learning now represents an alternative to the passive learning approach (Asik-Dizdar, 2015; Riordan et al., 2017; Tasto et al., 2016). Soft skills development courses taught in this manner incorporates activities stimulating real-life environments that can provide the opportunity to practice what's learned in theory (Asik-Dizdar, 2015; Riordan et al., 2017). This approach is an attempt to encourage increased student engagement that is the underlying driver for increasing student understanding (Tasto et al., 2016).

An Alternative Pedagogical Soft Skills Training and Development Approach

After researching and writing this paper and given my classes in Principles of Management, Managerial Decision Making, and Organization Behavior-Leadership, I changed my classroom teaching style to incorporate a realistic, experiential, applied, active learning format. Of the three commonly known learning theories or philosophical frameworks under which learning falls: behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism (Alzaghoul, 2012; Kay & Kibble, 2016; Nagorwah & Nagorwah, 2009; Tetteh, 2016; Wang, 2012), the most applicable learning theory that initially fits my classroom soft skills developmental pedagogy seems to be constructivism. Constructivism focuses on knowledge construction based on a learner's previous experience and a major emphasis is on situated learning activities that allows learners to contextualize their information. The instructor, playing an advising and facilitating role, sees students as being active rather than passive, focuses on collaborative, cooperative, discovery and experiential learning and makes learning meaningful and illustrative by including examples and inquiry-based and problem-based cases for theoretical and practical information (Alzaghoul,

2012; Day & Kibble, 2016; Tetteh, 2016). I see in each of the four words in this classroom pedagogy—realistic, experiential, applied, and active—an opportunity to create certain soft skills development in my students.

The realistic classroom format is accomplished in a couple of different ways and are consistently used throughout my entire semester. First, all of my classes utilize a case study analysis and an oral and written presentation of the realistic case-related, problems or situations faced by management in real organizations. This is not a single case analysis, but students in teams are required to analyze ten or more short cases during the semester. I find this approach increasing my students' development of oral and written communication, teamwork, decision making/problem solving, leadership, innovation/creativity/negotiation, and interpersonal relationship skills.

Second, realism in terms of workplace reality is found in the grading system and attendance policy used in all my classes. I provide three points rather than just one point for a correct multiple choice or true-false test question (thus, a two point reward), but I deduct one point rather than allow zero points for an incorrect answer (thus, a loss or penalty of one point). My students are therefore put into a position of recognizing that career-related work and the world of business incurs both rewards and penalties or losses. The soft skills development of decision making/problem solving/critical thinking, adaptability/self-motivation/willingness to learn, and professional responsibility skills occurs with this realistic classroom activity.

Many organizational workplaces require people to physically attend work on time to begin their work schedule. Thus, my students obtain five points for on-time class attendance and do not receive any points for absenteeism or for being late. Adaptability/self-motivation and professional responsibility skills are enhanced by this realistic requirement.

A final workplace reality is that the case method utilizes teams that are given the option to fire members from the team. There is an appeals process, but it's highly unlikely the fired students will survive the semester-long wrath of fellow team members who have been required to do their own work as well as the loafing student's work. Given the power to actually fire members from their teams (and students do execute this option), the soft skills of teamwork, decision making/problem solving, ethical judgment/moral integrity/professional responsibility, negotiation, adaptability, and interpersonal relationship skills are developed when they enter their deliberations about this firing option.

The aspects of my classroom-based experiential learning approach includes group/team work, role playing, reflection, presentations, cooperation, and competition. Experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing in which learners are first immersed in an experience (the case analysis) and then this immersion encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Individual students in my classes are first required to prepare a written response to a case question or series of questions before coming to class for a workshop episode in which the student team then hears and grades its own member's written answer(s) using a rank order protocol. This rank order protocol means no students can get the same number of points. The team must then decide a final, overall answer and then orally present their answer either to

another student executive team representing the case's organization or to the entire class. Soft skill development in terms of oral and written communications, ethical judgment, social/diversity awareness and sensitivity, decision making, problem-solving/critical/creative thinking, interpersonal relationships augmentation, teamwork, and leadership receive continuous reinforcement in my classes since these types of numerous experiential case learning activities are continuously dealt with over the entire semester.

Active learning encapsulates student activities in a class session that requires students to do more than just simply watch, listen and take notes (Felder & Brent, 2009). Active learning requires students to engage and collaborate to co-create their classroom experience and have been claimed to be more effective than passive approaches (the traditional lecture, memorization/regurgitation test protocol) (e.g., Riordan et al., 2017; Tasto et al., 2016).

Active learning activities can be either instructor controlled or student controlled (Riordan et al., 2017). My classes incorporate structured team activities that have a heavy orientation toward the realistic problems cited in the cases to be analyzed and presented by the students. Thus, my classes lean more to being student controlled and driven in an applied learning orientation.

There is one classroom activity that utilizes all the originally described soft skills mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Unfortunately, this activity is sporadic and non-continuous. This activity is a group-taken test rather than an individual-taken test. When applicable, students take their first major test in their respective case analysis groups under a strict time requirement. The test is generally a combination of multiple-choice questions and essay questions. It is quite fascinating to see the group members utilizing all the soft skills in such a time-restrictive, student controlled, applied environment.

Hard technical skills are developed because the utilized cases cover the technical-related chapter material. This technical material is further reinforced via the three comprehensive-based tests that cover the previous chapter's tested material. Given that I lecture over the technical material in the chapters as well as test over this material, I am also employing the traditional passive learning approach in my classes.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this pedagogical revision is the muting of the claim by some faculty that do not employ alternative learning strategies solely due to time constraints that hold them to a reliance on the traditional passive lecture class format and thus, their emphasis of trying to teach just hard skills (Tasto et al., 2016). With my realistic, experiential, applied, active learning approach, I have found I have less pressure to deliver all the aspects of a formal technical hard skills lecture and instead can truly be more helpful in guiding the development of my student's soft skills. This is clearly only one of many possible soft skills pedagogical development methods and the results of using this method have yet to receive any empirical verification, but remember this article was to entice further future dialogue and discussions about the development of soft skills in our business students.

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