

Professional Empowerment

Success comes through the science of soft skills

by Nicholas Dungan

Professionals do not succeed just by doing their jobs. They succeed by how they do their jobs.

Career success exemplifies the 80-20 rule. Fully 80 per cent of the ability to succeed in one's working life depends on a mere 20 per cent of what one does. You have to do the 80 per cent just to get your job done, but that constitutes only 20 per cent of the success of your career. The other 80 per cent of success depends on the remaining 20 per cent of time and effort, and that key 20 per cent concerns largely the science of soft skills.

The value of soft skills

Professionals and executives, from mid-career to CEO level, need to enhance their leadership and influence skills, for their own benefit in managing their work and their careers, and for the benefit of the organisations they serve. Developing their soft skills helps to reinforce these professionals' management expertise and sensibilities and, in so doing, serves to magnify these professionals' effectiveness within their organisations and beyond.

Process of a soft skills programme

In large organisations, when select groups of professionals are drawn from different disciplines, specialisations and geographies, working together on soft skills — under the tutelage of an experienced advisor — serves to increase collegiality among the professionals and intensify their shared culture by offering them the opportunity to interact with each other and to create joint approaches to practical, stimulating, inspirational issues beyond their daily responsibilities.

Similarly, individual senior managers, C-suite executives and CEOs themselves can benefit from a personalised, bespoke soft-skills awareness programme, again under the tutelage of an experienced advisor. Concentrating on soft skills helps to position these professionals as influencers both within their organisations and in their broader business communities and ecosystems.

Although a soft skills programme can take many forms, especially when tailored to the specific requirements of an individual or group, it is helpful to think of it in four movements.

First Movement: Understanding influence and leadership

- Without this introductory phase, the deployment of soft skills is devoid of adequate context.

Second Movement: Exercising influence and leadership — skills and techniques

- This movement focuses on work I need to do on myself to achieve leadership and influence.

Third Movement: Exercising influence and leadership in organisations and society

- This movement examines how to deploy my leadership and influence capabilities.

Fourth Movement: You the influencer and leader

- And this final movement pulls together the strands of who I am as a leader and influencer.

First Movement: Understanding influence and leadership

- What do we mean by 'influence'?
- The art of authentic influence
- What's the purpose of influence?
- Influence and awareness
- Influence and leadership are not the same
- The art of authentic leadership
- The dilemma of 'it depends'
- Five forms of influence
- Main methods of influence
- Benefits of a strategy of influence

Second Movement: Exercising influence and leadership – skills and techniques

- How to shine with no time to prepare
- How to read a room
- How to own a room
- How to deal with the media
- The challenge of social media
- How to write a speech
- How to deliver a speech
- How to write an article in 1/2 hour
- Talking and listening
- Zooming

Third Movement: Exercising influence and leadership in organisations and society

- What are my business ecosystems?
- Working within organisations and groups
- Authority vs example
- Managing up, down and sideways
- Concepts of engagement
- Value of engagement
- Strategies of engagement
- Techniques of engagement
- Negotiation
- Business development

Fourth Movement: You the influencer

- Creating a strategy of influence
- Building networks of influence
- Value or vanity of networking
- Are you a hedgehog or a fox?
- Managing yourself
- Becoming your own persona
- Choices: you, your company, the client
- Representing your organisation
- The value of awareness
- Benefits of a strategy of influence redux

Methodology of a soft skills programme

The topics in such a soft skills programme should be covered through a Socratic approach. The advisor poses a scenario, or mini-case study, or problem. Contained within these questions — and therefore within the answers to the questions and within the subsequent discussion — are the topics of influence and leadership embedded in that approach to soft skills. The advisor should also provide stimulating examples, summaries of content and positive feedback.