ELEVATING PERFORMANCE: CULTIVATING SOFT SKILLS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the relationship between organizational effectiveness and soft skills, highlighting the importance of these skills for employees. With the advent of Industry 4.0, characterized by new technologies, there's a growing demand for updated competencies and skill sets. The research employed quantitative data analysis, collecting survey responses from 364 participants. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized for data analysis, revealing that possessing the mentioned soft skills contributes to organizational excellence. This research paper will help working professionals to understand the importance of these skills and inculcate them for their betterment.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Organizational Excellence, Empirical Study, Employees.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, the significance of soft skills in driving organizational excellence has become increasingly profound. As the business landscape undergoes rapid and unpredictable changes, organizations are recognizing the critical role that soft skills play in navigating these challenges and fostering sustainable success. According to (Promis, 2008) soft skills are essential for all levels of professional work, not just top management positions. This does not diminish the significance of technical expertise; rather, it underscores the importance of complementing technical skills with soft skills. (Laker & Powell, 2011)soft skills due to the realization that technical expertise alone, even in technical roles, is insufficient for sustained success beyond the initial stages of employment.

Soft skills play a vital role in driving organizational excellence, complementing technical proficiency, and fostering a conducive work environment. As noted by (Anderson & Adams, 2019), the integration of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability contribute significantly to enhancing productivity and innovation within the workplace. Likewise, the employer surveys conducted by Manpower and Adecco underscored the rising need for these skills among employers (Lippman et al., 2015) and highlighted the gap in soft skills within the current workforce (Abidi, 2018; Hurrell, 2016; ManpowerGroup (Firm), 2013).

The influence of soft skills on organizational excellence can be understood through various frameworks such as human capital theory and social exchange theory.

Human capital theory posits that investments in employee skills and abilities, including soft skills, lead to increased productivity and organizational performance.

Social exchange theory, on the other hand, suggests that interactions between individuals within an organization are based on reciprocal exchanges of resources, including emotional support and cooperation.

Yet, empirical, and theoretical investigations have not conclusively established the extent to which employees' soft skills influence organizational excellence. (Kumari et al., 2023) carried out a bibliometric literature review about the interaction between soft skills and organizational excellence and pointed out the need to examine the empirical relationship between soft skills and organizational excellence.

Thus, this research examines the profound impact of soft skills on organizational excellence within the context of the VUCA world, drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to elucidate their importance. By exploring how soft skills enable organizations to effectively navigate uncertainty, embrace complexity, and capitalize on opportunities. This paper shed light on the strategic imperative of developing and leveraging soft skills in today's dynamic and turbulent business environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Soft Skills

Soft skills can be described as a collection of individualized characteristics, competencies, attributes, and abilities that are indispensable in the professional environment (Wesley et al., 2017). According to the report by Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development, Skills are a component of comprehensive description of competency, encompassing the deployment of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to fulfil complex demands (OECD, 2019). The significant relevance of soft skills within the service industry is undeniable, particularly when it comes to conveying fresh concepts or engaging in negotiations. These entrepreneurial endeavours demand a comprehensive set of skills, encompassing traits like a polished professional manner, effective communication, and adept leadership abilities. In a professional setting, key soft skills include honesty, effective communication, politeness, accountability, interpersonal abilities, optimistic demeanour, professionalism, adaptability, collaboration, and strong work ethics (Robles, 2012).

Based on previous research, employees' soft skills significantly contribute to enhancing the internal and external capabilities of the firm. Regardless of their type, including innovation, the development of non-technical skills is essential (Tether et al., 2005).

As per previous literature, Communication skills, Leadership skills and Teamwork skills are important (Anderson & Adams, 2019; Smith & Mounter, 2005; Vinay Kumar Pandey & Sarika Shukla, 2020). Adding to these soft skills few reports mention, Emotional Intelligence skills and Creativity skills are necessary for the organizations (Deloitte, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020).

Communication skills foster clarity and transparency, ensuring that information is conveyed accurately and comprehensively throughout the organization. Leadership skills encompass an individual's capacity to guide a team, make decisions, assume accountability, and prioritize the collective welfare of both the team and the organization. Teamwork skills are evident across all sectors as employees are required to collaborate within teams, manage specific tasks, and ensure follow-through, highlighting the fundamental importance of teamwork as a crucial soft skill in corporate environments. Emotional Intelligence skill plays a crucial role in organizational excellence by enhancing interpersonal relationships, decision-making, and overall team dynamics. Creativity skill is a catalyst for driving organizational

excellence by enabling organizations to stay agile, innovative, and responsive to changing market dynamics and customer needs.

These findings underscore the importance of developing a diverse range of soft skills to thrive in today's dynamic and competitive business environment.

2.1.1 Communication Skills

Communication skills, also recognised as one of the key soft skills is important in today's global business environment (John, 2009). Effective communication skills are crucial for both work retention and advancement. Organisations with efficient communication procedures achieve task-related goals and promote happy work cultures (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2002). According to a study by (Men, 2014), proficient communication fosters a culture of transparency, trust, and mutual understanding within an organization. Clear communication not only facilitates the dissemination of information but also ensures alignment of goals, minimizes conflicts, and enhances productivity. Hence, prioritizing the enhancement of communication abilities isn't merely a choice but a vital requirement for companies aiming to excel in the contemporary competitive environment.

H1: Communication Skills positively affects organizational excellence.

2.1.2 Leadership Skills

Leadership abilities are essential not just for personal growth, but also for social and organisational success. Leadership skills are a set of human characteristics and learnable qualities that enable people to lead, communicate effectively, empower others, and develop a leadership culture within an organisation. It involves a variety of attributes and skills that empower individuals to adeptly lead, encourage, and ignite others in the pursuit of shared objectives (Northouse, 2021).

(Abson, 2021) suggests that people might not inherently possess leadership qualities, but they can acquire the essential skills needed to excel in leadership roles through development and practice. Research revealed a strong correlation between leadership skills and job performance, indicating a high level of organizational excellence (Rahman & Ghazali, 2021).

H2: Leadership skills positively affects organizational excellence.

2.1.3 Teamwork Skills

Teamwork skills are crucial for organizational excellence as they facilitate collaboration, synergy, and efficiency within teams, ultimately leading to improved performance and outcomes (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). In today's complex and dynamic work environment, where tasks are often multifaceted and require diverse expertise, the ability to work effectively in teams is essential for achieving organizational goals. Conversely, studies have also shown several obstacles to teamwork, including members' inability to fulfil deadlines and their general lack of understanding of and sensitivity to diversity (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Kalev, 2009; Wesley et al., 2017).

Teamwork skills are integral for fostering collaboration, innovation, and high performance within organizations. By investing in developing and promoting teamwork skills among employees, organizations can enhance their competitive advantage,

drive continuous improvement, and achieve excellence in their operations and outcomes.

H3: Teamwork Skills positively affects organizational excellence.

2.1.4. Creativity skills

Creativity skills are indispensable in the pursuit of organizational excellence. In the current dynamic and competitive business environment, organizations consistently encounter obstacles that necessitate creative resolutions. Creativity enables individuals to think outside the box, generate novel ideas, and devise unconventional approaches to problem-solving. As organizations strive for excellence, they must foster a culture that encourages and harnesses creativity at all levels. According to(Amabile, 1998) creativity plays a crucial role in organizational success, as it fuels innovation, enhances adaptability, and drives continuous improvement. By nurturing creativity skills among employees, organizations can unlock new opportunities, stay ahead of the curve, and ultimately achieve excellence in their endeavours.

H4: Creativity skills positively affects organizational excellence.

2.1.5 Emotional Intelligence Skills

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in fostering organizational excellence by enhancing interpersonal dynamics, decision-making processes, and overall team performance. According to a study conducted by (Bourne et al., 2017), leaders demonstrating higher emotional intelligence are more capable of inspiring and driving their teams, resulting in enhanced employee engagement and productivity. Additionally, those with robust EI skills excel in handling conflicts constructively, nurturing a positive workplace atmosphere, and fostering resilient teams capable of navigating challenges adeptly. In today's ever evolving and intricate business environment, where collaboration and adaptability are crucial, organizations prioritizing the cultivation of emotional intelligence within their workforce are positioned for prolonged excellence and competitive edge.

H5: Emotional intelligence skills positively affect organizational excellence.

2.2 Organizational Excellence

Organizational excellence is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions such as efficiency, innovation, adaptability, and employee engagement, all aimed at achieving superior performance and sustained success. Moreover, efforts to enhance performance have focused on achieving organizational excellence to stay competitive by fostering creativity and innovation (Mohamed et al., 2018). Organisational excellence involves establishing internal standards and processes that inspire staff to provide customer-satisfactory products and services within corporate expectations. Organisational excellence refers to consistently exceeding objectives, needs, and expectations. According to (de Ven et al., 1983) organizations that strive for excellence prioritize factors such as a clear vision, strong leadership, a culture of continuous improvement, and a relentless focus on customer satisfaction. By integrating these elements into their operations, organizations can foster a competitive advantage and enhance their overall effectiveness in meeting both internal and external stakeholder needs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the investigation, a quantitative method was employed to conduct the analysis. Data was gathered using a standardised questionnaire based on 5- point Likert Scale varying from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The information was gathered between January and March 2024. This study encompassed working professionals across different sectors. A total of 367 valid questionnaire responses were received. The collected data was analysed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Analysis (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS 4 software. PLS-SEM allows for the separate computation of measurement and structural model interactions, as opposed to simultaneous analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the sample

Identity	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	41.2%
	Female	58.8%
Age	18-24	8.8%
	25-34	29.4%
	35-44	35.3%
	45-54	14.7%
	55-64	8.8%
	65 and above	2.9%
Work Experience	Less than a year	8.8%
	1-3	17.6%
	4-6	8.8%
	7-9	14.7%
	10-12	8.9%
	More than 12 years	41.2%

Table 1 provides descriptive data to understand the study's sample characteristics. The sample's gender distribution looks balanced, with 41.2% identifying as male and 58.8% as female. Regarding the age group, largest proportion, 35.3% respondents were between 35-44 years of age group, 29.4% are of 25-34 years of age, 14.7% are of 45-54 years, 8.8% each fall in the category of 18-24 and 55-64 age group and only 2.9% are of 65 and above age group. Finally, the data explains work experience of the respondents where most of the respondents are working for than 12 years (41.2%), 17.6% have a work experience of 1 to 3 years, 14.7% are working for 7 to 9 years, 8.9% have a work experience of 10 to 12 years and the lowest percentage, 8.8% are working for 4 to 6 years and 8.8% are freshers.

4. RESULTS

The measuring model was developed prior to hypothesis testing. To do this, all manifest variables were verified for outliers. This confirms that the measurement scales are valid and reliable.

The measurement methodology is reliable, with outer loadings above 0 .708 as recommended by (Hair et al., 2019), Cronbach's alpha values of at least 0.600 (Hair et al., 2017) and rho_A values above 0.700 (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015)and all composite reliability values surpass 0.800(Hair et al., 2010). Hair et al., 2019demonstrated that convergent validity requires an average variance extracted (AVE) of at least 0.500 for all constructs. This suggests that our measuring approach has strong convergent validity.

Table 2: Outer Loadings of items on each construct and measurement model with construct validity and reliability.

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Rho_A	Rho_C	AVE	VIF
SOFT SKILLS							
Communication Skills	CS1	0.902	0.912	0.928	0.934	0.741	4.073
	CS2	0.902					3.816
	CS3	0.877					2.892
	CS4	0.878					2.831
	CS5	0.735					1.831
Emotional Intelligence Skills	EQ1	0.9	0.930	0.931	0.947	0.782	3.677
	EQ2	0.879					3.362
	EQ3	0.914					4.491
	EQ4	0.9					4.153
	EQ5	0.824					2.22
Leadership Skills	LS1	0.734	0.828	0.828	0.88	0.595	1.869
	LS2	0.799					2.319
	LS3	0.806					2.007
	LS4	0.81					2.373
	LS5	0.7					1.913
Creativity Skills	CR3	0.825	0.769	0.777	0.866	0.684	1.662
	CR4	0.869					1.75
	CR5	0.785					1.424
Teamwork Skills	TS1	0.788	0.867	0.869	0.904	0.654	2.196
	TS2	0.828					2.991
	TS3	0.813					2.299
	TS4	0.878					2.96
	TS5	0.729					2.02
Organizational Excellence	OE1	0.798	0.967	0.969	0.971	0.753	3.423
	OE2	0.903					7.087
	OE3	0.876					5.687
	OE4	0.881					6.872
	OE5	0.901					7.055
	OE6	0.916					7.059
	OE7	0.904					5.743
	OE8	0.837					5.308
	OE9	0.832					6.097
	OE10	0.824					7.234
	OE11	0.867					5.024

To confirm the distinct items in our model were truly measuring unique features, we evaluated their discriminant validity using the HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait) ratio of correlations. As demonstrated by their high sensitivity rates, the HTMT criteria successfully detect a lack of discriminant validity. This involves comparing the correlations between different traits and methods (heterotrait-heteromethod) with those of the same traits and different methods (monotrait-heteromethod) (Henseler et al., 2015). To reduce the HTMT by raising average monotrait-heteromethod correlations, two indicators of creative skills that had low correlations with other measures of the same construct were removed. As per Henseler et al., 2015., the value of HTMT ratio should be lower than either 0.85 or 0.90 to establish discriminant validity. Table displays the results of HTMT and demonstrates the establishment of discriminant based on HTMT.90 for the constructs.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Constructs	Creativity Skills	Communication Skills	Emotional Skills	Leadership Skills	Organizational Excellence	Teamwork Skills
Creativity Skills						
Communication Skills	0.640					
Emotional Skills	0.674	0.665				
Leadership Skills	0.775	0.833	0.816			
Organizational Excellence	0.714	0.664	0.779	0.798		
Teamwork Skills	0.881	0.757	0.792	0.868	0.782	

Structural Model
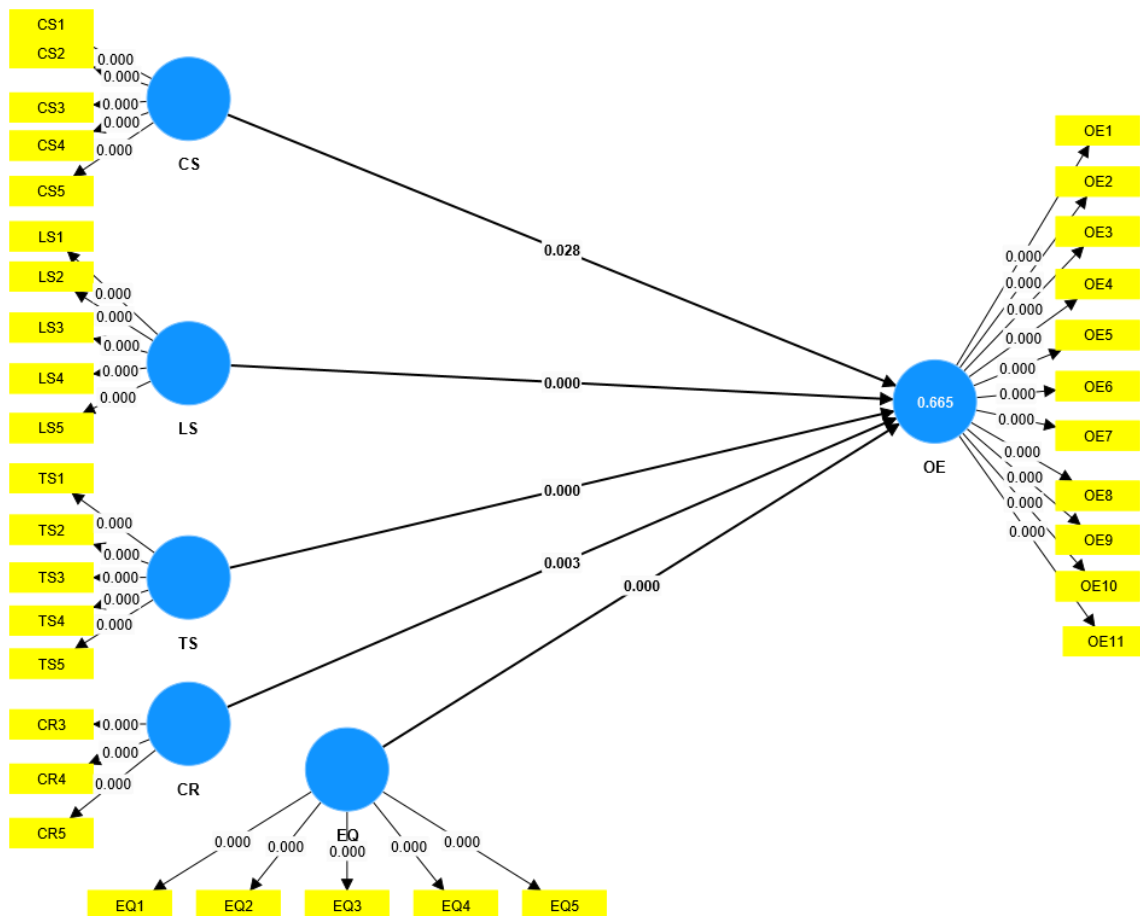
R-Square Test

The R-Square Test is employed for assessing the inner structural model (Falk & Miller, 1992). It measures the influence of Soft Skills (comprising CS, CR, TS, LS, and EQ) on factors related to Organizational Excellence. The outcomes of this test are presented in the accompanying table.

Table 4: R- Square Value

Latent Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
OE	0.665	0.66

The table 4 shows R^2 value is 0.665. It shows that the ability of soft skills in explaining Organizational excellence is 66.5%.

Hypothesis Testing

A significance test is necessary in hypothesis testing to determine the true significance of a hypothesised connection between variables. The non-significant estimate parameter indicates that the coefficient is not significantly different from zero. For an effect to occur, the coefficient must be non-zero and significant. The T statistic or p-value indicates significance.

Table 5: Structural Model Analysıs

Hypothesis	Path	Original sample (Standardized coefficient)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	CR -> OE	0.121	0.040	3.022	0.003	Supported
H2	CS -> OE	0.092	0.042	2.199	0.028	Supported
H3	EQ -> OE	0.348	0.043	8.157	0.000	Supported
H4	LS -> OE	0.193	0.055	3.541	0.000	Supported
H5	TS -> OE	0.183	0.047	3.906	0.000	Supported

The result of the structural model is presented in figure, it was hypothesized in H1 that creative skills would impact the organizational excellence positively. This hypothesis was supported by the data (β = 0.121, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the variables "Communication Skills" (β= 0.092, $p < 0.05$), "Emotional Intelligence Skills" (β= 0.348, $p < 0.05$), "Leadership Skills" (β= 0.193, $p < 0.05$), and "Teamwork Skills" (β= 0.183, $p < 0.05$) have a statistically significant positive effect on the construct "Organizational Excellence", thus supporting H2, H3, H4 and H5 respectively. Table 5 shows the impact of the research variables including T Statistics and P-Values.

5. DISCUSSION

The research investigated how soft skills impact organizational success through the elevated social abilities of employees, highlighting the significant influence of effective soft skills on employee performance and organizational excellence.

Firstly, in relation to the connection between creativity skills and organizational excellence, hypothesis posited a positive impact, and statistics supported the same (β=0.121, t= 3.022, p= 0.003). Creativity among employees leads to increased innovation, problem-solving and generation of new ideas of developing groundbreaking products, services, or processes that give the organization a competitive edge and contribute to its excellence (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Secondly, regarding the correlation between communication skills and organizational excellence, the hypothesis suggests a positive among the two. The statistical results revealed a significant positive correlation between communication skills and organizational excellence (β=0.092, t= 2.199, p= 0.028). A study conducted by (Jones & LeBaron, 2002) supports the hypothesis by stating that organizations with employees who possess strong communication skills tend to achieve higher levels of productivity, efficiency, and overall success. effective communication fosters collaboration, reduces misunderstandings, and enhances employee engagement, all of which contribute to organizational excellence. Also, as per the finding's communication skill is the least influential on organizational excellence as compared among the given 5 soft skills. These findings have implications for students as well as employees to enhance their communication skills benefitting their job profile.

Thirdly hypotheses three explains the correlation between emotional intelligence skill and organizational excellence. The analysis supports the hypothesis by demonstrating a significant influence of emotional intelligence skill on organizational excellence, with results as (β=0.348, t=8.157, p= 0.000). This finding implies that emotional intelligence has the highest impact on organizational excellence as compared with the other 5 soft skills. Employees with superior emotional intelligence understands and manages their own emotions effectively as well as those of others. They can build stronger relationships, improve teamwork, and ultimately enhance organizational performance. A study by (Goleman et al., 2002)aligns with the results which found that leaders with high emotional intelligence tend to create more cohesive teams, foster better communication, and navigate conflicts effectively, all which contribute to organizational success.

Forth, regarding the relation between leadership skills and emotional intelligence, hypothesis three suggested a positive influence of leadership skills and organizational excellence, which was substantiated by the results. The findings revealed (β=0.193, t=3.541, p=0.000) the robust relationship. This aligns with previous research by (Avolio et al., 2009)which discussed that transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring and motivating followers, fosters higher levels of employee engagement, innovation, and performance, ultimately contributing to organizational excellence. Effective leaders set clear goals, provide support and guidance to their team members, and cultivate a positive organizational culture, all of which are crucial for achieving excellence within an organization.

Fifth, concerning the relationship between teamwork skills and organizational excellence, hypothesis 5 proposed a positive relation of teamwork skills and organizational excellence. Thus, the statistical analysis supported the hypothesis with the results (β=0.183, t=3.906, p= 0.000). Research by (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) revealed that high- performing teams, characterized by strong collaboration, shared goals and mutual accountability, are essential for achieving organizational excellence.

This research discusses the positive impact of soft skills on organizational excellence. This implies that employees who possess strong soft skills such as communication, creativity, emotional intelligence, leadership, and teamwork, they are better equipped to collaborate, innovate, and adapt to changing circumstances within the organization. This, in turn, leads to improved performance, productivity, and overall success of the organizational. Therefore, investing in the development of soft skills among employees can significantly contribute to achieving and maintaining organizational excellence.

6. IMPLICATION

This research paves the way for employees and employers. The implication of soft skills influencing organizational excellence is profound, as they serve as the catalyst for fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and adaptability within the workplace. Soft skills empower employees to realize their full potential by improving their ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and adapt to changing circumstances, to sustain in today's work environment. Also, Organizations that prioritize the development of soft skills demonstrate a commitment to employee growth and development which can enhance retention rates. By integrating soft skills into various aspects of organizational practice, from recruitment and training to performance management and culture-building, organizations can realize the full

potential of their workforce and achieve excellence in today's competitive business landscape. At the same time, it underscores the importance of developing effective strategies to smoothly incorporate and enhance soft skills in both educational settings and societal interactions, ensuring that upcoming professionals possess these essential abilities.

7. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The constraints of this study potentially lack the generalizability to the entire population of India due to its relatively small sample size. While the findings may provide valuable insight into the specific group studied, they may not accurately represent the broader diversity and complexity of the Indian population. Additionally, with a smaller sample size, there is a risk of increased variability of the study's results. Therefore, cautiousness should be exercised while extrapolating the results with the larger population, and further research with larger and more varied samples may be necessary to confirm and generalize the findings.

As a guide for future studies, academics may consider broadening the scope and details of soft skills from both theoretical and applied perspectives. Exploring various contexts such as domestic, educational, and social settings could yield deeper insights into how soft skills influence individuals for organizational success. It is crucial to intensify research in this area, considering that soft skills are crucial elements in both present and future contexts. A thorough grasp of their significance will aid in nurturing soft skills in ways that are not only advantageous but also enduring for individuals, organizations, and society at large.

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