STUDY OF SKILLS REQUIRED POST PANDEMIC IN HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a lot of disturbance throughout the world. The global economy had come to standstill for few months. There were lot of changes taking place in the corporate sector, IT sector, manufacturing sector, service sector, travel industry, education sector, in-short, the pandemic had hit all the sectors and changed the style of working of every sector and industry.

It was natural that with so many drastic changes taking place at work front, there will be lot of changes in the style of working. Also, the skills that are needed also would be different. It was noted that the skills listed the study have always been in the bundle of required or essential skills, but with changes due to pandemic, certain skills from the bundle have taken a front seat and have gained more importance in the post COVID scenario.

A structured questionnaire was designed in order to collect responses from the stakeholders in hospitality sector. The questionnaire in Google Form was circulated to the employees of hospitality industry, the academicians involved in training the students and the students pursuing hospitality management courses. Total 40 responses were collected. Analysis of received responses was done with the help of graphs and charts. And the findings and conclusion was derived from the same.

The author had listed down few important skills from various articles and published research literature, surveys and reports. But the responses did not completely match with the earlier literature published by other authors.

The findings reveal that Use of Technology for Presentations, Critical Thinking ability, Problem Solving skill and Collaboration or Teamwork are highly significant and important skills to be possessed by the candidates employed in hospitality sector.

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Skills like Ease with using Software, Using different applications at POS, willingness to Accept Extra Responsibility at Workplace and Empathy towards customers or guests as well as colleagues in the organization are rated as fairly important for the employees.

There are few skills where equal number of respondents has rated it as highly crucial as well as fairly important, these skills are being Flexible with Duty Timings, Accepting Change in Work Profile and Accepting Changes in Routine or Schedules at workplace.

It can be concluded that the stakeholders who are associated with the hospitality industry, have a different perspective towards the requirement of skills in post pandemic scenario. It can be an indication that the wave of anxiety and uncertainty is on the decreasing mode. And now, the entire scene is moving from New Normal to Back to Normal in almost every aspect of life as well as workplace.

Keywords: Skills, Pandemic, Hospitality Sector

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic changed the whole world. Almost every country was under lockdown and that changed the work routine completely. Many employees had to continue working from home, attending online meetings and training sessions, taking extra responsibilities due to less manpower and at times taking over the role of other employees even if they did not have the required skills to carry out the job responsibility.

Amidst this situation, every individual was undergoing tremendous pressure, stress and facing lot of anxiety. Also, it was quite unclear as to how will be the work scenario post pandemic when everything comes to Normal from A New Normal. But at the same time it was pretty evident that the world will may not be the same as it was before pandemic. There will be many changes at work front and that will demand few skills which the companies and employers would expect to be possessed by the employees.

Majority of the employers believe that soft skills and interpersonal skills will prove to be very important in post pandemic work scenario. These skills would help in keeping the workforce together as a team and will improve productivity. Apart from technical skills or hands-on skills, few soft skills will prove to be quite significant like emotional intelligence, effective communication, empathy towards colleagues and customers, listening skills and flexibility and adaptability. These skills will be very effective, especially in the remote working scenario, where employees are collaborating from a distance and still need to give highest possible productivity.

The employers state that the soft skills will help in building stronger relationships which will result in retaining customers and achieving steady sales and engaging the internal customers which will lead to low turnover, innovations, more productivity and eventually profitability for the organization.

The study is to understand the requirement of the skills which will be crucial for employees to sustain the work front after the pandemic. The skills are discussed and elaborated below in detail which will be quite significant and will have importance.

1. **Collaboration:** Many work places were closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.Due to lockdown almost all employees had to work from home. People were secluded and lonely in their home, thus could not communicate with each other directly or face-to-face. Human being is a social animal and these interactions, formal as well as informal are very important on daily basis. These interactions help in sharing the ideas, thoughts and emotions. These interactions are a base of forming strong bonds and build trust amongst people around you. It results in better co-ordination, understanding each other and smooth flow of work. It is crucial for every organization which builds a better work environment.

2. **Digital expertise:** Every sector has experienced digital initiation in past few years. Every sector and business around the globe have benefited to a large extent due to advent at technological front. That proved to be bliss in the scenario of lockdown which ledpeople to go for Remote Working, Virtual Meetings & Presentation. For few it was very convenient but for few it was a kind of compulsion and challenging work. But it was

remarkable that most of the employees, students and even teachers could cope up with the use of technology for remote working.

Moreover, hospitality was one of the sectors which majorly depended upon technology for various operations even in daily routine. The most important aspect which the hospitality industry had to follow was Contactless Services at various points of sale due to safety and hygiene purpose. The guests expected the same as to keep distance from people and equipment to avoid any kind of infections, especially in places with many people around and using the facilities & space.

3. **Emotional quotient:** COVID-19 pandemic created tremendous disturbance at psychological level amongst most of the people. There were lot of reasons behind this turbulence like lockdowns, remote working, lack of social interactions, loss of employment in some cases, deductions in salaries and lot of uncertainties. A study reveals that the emotional unrest amongst people was very high in 2020 as compared to previous years. It is natural that the emotional state of an individual has direct impact on the performance at work. It is a need of the hour that an individual needs to be strong in managing anxiety, stress & depression.

4. **Flexibility:** The pandemic had massive impact on almost all industries & sectors globally. The businesses were affected to a large extent. Post pandemic it was a testing time for all the industries to come back to normal pace and revive from the losses. The corporate sector and other industries are taking some hard steps to overcome the challenges posed due to pandemic. There are changes on many fronts like technology and economic front. To overcome the challenges the organisations are going in for changes like work profile of an employee, change in work timings, the responsibilities to carry out etc. If an individual has to sustain these changes, one has to be adaptive to changes and be flexible. If one is rigid and not ready to accept changes around you, it becomes difficult to survive in any sector. If one can adapt to the changes and mould according to the needs of the workplace, one can withstand the difficult period and they continue to be employed.

5. **Critical thinking:** As per a survey conducted by SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management), almost 37% employees stated that skills like Critical Thinking & Problem Solving are going to be very crucial for the future. Critical Thinking is required for evaluation and analysis of data. It is essential that one has an ability to analyse the data, especially under work pressure and still be able to provide unique solutions in any kind of scenario. Also, Problem Solving skill proves to be quite significant in terms of providing appropriate solution to the customers which are acceptable by the organization as well as the customers.

6. **Creativity:** Creativity is closely associated with Problem Solving. It is also called as Out of the Box thinking. Even in the era of technology, it is quite important that one makes an attempt to have some novel solutions. The pandemic has made it mandatory for employees to think on some novel solutions. The creative thinkers are able to overcome the obstacles and find solutions which will help the business operations.

7. **Career management:** The pandemic had huge impact on peoples' lives worldwide. There was a lot of turbulence at economic level and psychological level. Many of them

lost their jobs and were completely unaware as how to come out of the difficult situation. To overcome the setback, one must take charge of the situation and start looking for new opportunities, alternative or parallel career path for future. For few it might be required that they may have to learn new skills, get upgraded and acquire skills of higher order.

This is the time which may have opened new avenues for some of them who were unemployed due to pandemic.

8. **Cultural competence:** With globalization in many sectors, business houses are willing to recruit employees from different cultural backgrounds. The employers believe that the diversity in workforce will improve teamwork, productivity, increased brand reputation and revenue. Interpersonal skills proved to be very important during pandemic and moreover these skills were observed amongst people coming from diverse cultures.

9. **Learn to learn:** Every sector is experiencing advent at a fast pace. The organisations are growing and it is essential that every individual has to keep oneself updated with new technology and trends. The employees must be able to see the changes coming with future and be ready to fit the new requirements of the job market. Such updated knowledge and skills will be acknowledged in work environment and such individuals may have better opportunities to sustain in the corporate world for longer tenure.

Also, the newly acquired knowledge might help in opening to new prospects like entrepreneurship for the individuals.

Further section of literature review will throw more light upon the requirement of skills in the world after COVID-19. This section comprises of the views of different authors and research scholars about the need of skills in post pandemic work environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr. Rob Yeung - ACCA – Think Ahead (2020) The research carried out by ACCA Global has identified the five essential skills which are required by the employees in post pandemic scenario. Irrespective of age, gender, work experience have to inculcate these skills to survive in the work place. The researchers of business school also state that the following skills would help the candidates for employment in coming years as well.

The article has suggested critical skills like Collaboration, Digital Competence, Flexibility, Emotional Quotient and Career Management. The author suggests that these skills would make it possible for the employees to continue with the organization as an employee.

Mark Crawfoed (2021) in an article **High Demand Skills for a Post COVID World** writes that the pandemic has posed many challenges with lot of restrictions like work from home, maintaining safe distance, following hygienic practices etc. At the same time, the employers had a biggest challenge of keeping the show running. Though the business faced many problems like less manpower due to absenteeism of employees, unavailability of other resources like raw material, restricted timings for functioning or working hours, taking extra responsibilities irrespective of their skills and knowledge.

The author lists the essential skills required to survive in "New Normal" and even in future. These skills are Flexibility & Adaptability, Critical Thinking,

Bernard Marr (2020) in an article '**8 Job Skills To Succeed In A Post-Coronavirus World**' talks about the scenario post COVID – 19 pandemic. The author talks about eight important skills which would be required to be present in an individual to have successful career ahead.

The world had come to stand-still during lockdown. Everyone was anxious to know the world after COVID-19 pandemic. Especially for the corporate world, it was a major concern as the employees had experienced lot of changes during lockdown. It was quite natural that the employers would have much more expectations from the employees which will help the business to come back to "Normal from New Normal".

The article has listed few skills which are quite significant like Adaptability & Flexibility, Tech Savviness, Creativity & Innovation, Critical Thinking, Leadership, Emotional Intelligence.

Mark Lieberman (2021) in an article "**Top U.S. Companies: These Are the Skills Students Need in a Post-Pandemic World**" has mentioned about some soft skills which will prove to be quite significant in post pandemic scenario. A survey conducted by Education Week interviewed managers and executives of some top companies from different industries situated in USA. The companies which were taken for survey were Sysco, McKinsey, Microsoft, Delta, Apple, Boston Consulting Group, Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Chrysler, Cigna, General Motors and Hyatt.

The employees working with top management of leading organisations mentioned some critical soft skills like Effective Communication & Presentation, Flexibility & Agility, Growth mindset, Resilience, Teamwork, Collaboration, Willingness to learn new things, Conflict management, Stress & Anxiety Management, Creative & Innovative thinking, problem solving, Self-Discipline, Empathy, Cultural Competence and most importantly job proficiency and digital awareness.

ET Now Digital (2022) published an article '**Post pandemic, more employers to look for candidates with digital skills to hire**' stating the need of skills post pandemic. There are lot of changes taking place to revive the business and taking it to the new level. The employers are seeking digital competence.

A survey conducted with the employees of AWS (Amazon Web Services). The article states that the market is estimated to demand almost 7% of total workforce to have digital skills. According to a survey, around 95% employees feel that they should be upgrading in digital skills to keep up with the changed scenario at the workplace. On the other hand, only 45% employers have planned to train their employees as per the needs of new business.

AWS surveyed around one thousand employees who are digitally competent. Out of these three hundred employees were from India from different sectors like public, private and non-profit segments of various industries. The employees perceive that the future of any business needs online collaborations, technical support, cyber security, accounting software

& CRM on digital platform. Such skills will be most sought after by the employers by year 2025.

These skills will be needed in many sectors like healthcare, fintech, agriculture and even media & entertainment.

OECD (2021) published a research article "**An Assessment of the Impact of Covid-19 on Job and Skills Demand Using Online Job Vacancy Data**" related to the demand of skills post pandemic situation. The study reveals that there were lot of impact on skills demands and it is majorly due to restrictions imposed worldwide to avoid spread of the disease. The study considered the geographical area which included countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States and the United Kingdom. The study was conducted during the period of January 2020 to November 2020. The study revealed that there was a drastic decline in demand for online jobs but at the same time there was lot of demand of jobs in the sectors like healthcare and logistics. Along with the increased number of vacancies, there were increased demands in terms of skills as well. There were also increased opportunities in Work from Home jobs, Front-line workers and other sectors providing essential services.

The skills in demand were technical competencies, communication skills, teamwork etc. The study suggests that the government should have some plans to boost skill development to match the demands in long run.

European Labour Authority (2022) in an article **"Six soft skills you need in the post-pandemic workplace"** states that the pandemic has considerably sped up the requirement some critical skills at workplace. These skills are social skills & emotional skills which are most sought after by the employers. The skills that are mentioned as important are communication skills, problem solving, leadership, teamwork, work ethics and positive attitude. The author states that if one possesses these skills, then there will be opportunities for the individuals.

Gwen Moran (2020) in an article "**6 skills employees will need in the post-pandemic workplace**" has listed down few skills which are going to be crucial for employees working in any sector and industry. The author states that there were massive changes at work front, right from remote working, changes in roles at workplace and taking extra responsibilities, in other words acquiring new skills to complete the job.

The author states that need of skills is changing continuously in every sector. According to a survey, almost one third skills are not required in 2021 and which were listed as important skills in 2017 for a particular sector.

On the other hand, when the organizations are trying to revive from the setback of the pandemic, there are few skills which will be significant and would help employees to survive in the demanding market. These skills are self-direction, digital capabilities, empathy, communication management, adaptability and motivational skills.

The author says that these are the skills which will be very crucial in the post pandemic scenario and help the business as well as an individual employee to grow in the career.

Cecily Josten, Grace Lordan (2021) in the research article, "**The Accelerated Value of Social Skills in Knowledge Work and the COVID-19 Pandemic**" have studied the importance of social skills in post pandemic situation. The study considers the significance of these skills in the current scenario of technological initiation, 4.0. The authors state that it was a point of debate if few skills which are considered to be very crucial will hold same importance in the era of automation and digitalization. In continuation with the debate, now it is the time to think about the significance and relevance of some important skills post COVID-19 pandemic. The study has considered the significance of Social skills and its necessity in the world after pandemic. The authors state that these skills were more significant for the knowledge workers and the people in managerial positions.

The findings show that the governments of various nations are working on various strategies to rebuild the skills amongst adults and especially in the knowledge workers. The research concludes with a notion that the government should consider building up a framework of skills which will enable cross-curricular interface and is effective enough to impart these skills amongst adults as well.

Susan Lund, Anu Madgavkar, James Manyika, Sven Smit, Kweilin Ellingrud, Olivia Robinson (2021) in a report '**The future of work after COVID-19**' have studied the future trends in work conditions like remote working, acceleration in automation & e-commerce due to pandemic. It is estimated that over 25% workers may have to change their profession. The pandemic has caused lot of disturbance in the labour market in the year 2020 throughout the world. Many people lost their jobs, many workers had to shift to remote working as the offices were closed. But at the same time many people continued working as front line workers in health sector and other essential services.

The workforce had transition in the normal routine due to the pandemic and the management had to design training programs for employees to cope up with new routines and procedures. Businesses also promoted innovations and they provided required support for the same. The organisations also have to analyse as to which jobs can be done online and which jobs have to be carried out in the workplace

Jordan Turner and Mary Baker (2022) in an article "**Future of Work Trends Post COVID-19**" have studied the employees work relationships and their expectations of work. It is a great challenge for the HR managers to understand the impact of pandemic on the work culture and future trends in workplace. On one hand the organisations are facing shortage of labour and employees and on the other hand the HR department has an opportunity to get new talent and fresh workforce to overcome the lapse.

At the same time, the employees also have a changed perspective towards workplace and is expecting transformed scenario at the work front. The employers expect the following

1. Hybrid work routine and procedures
2. Opportunity for Critical Talent
3. Well-being and welfare
4. Increased employee turnover
5. Onsite employees may have more chances of promotions than remote working mode.
6. Change in Manager's role

7. In-person working but with flexibility in schedules
8. Shorter weeks/ less number of working days
9. Exhaustive data collection for planning

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is an effort to understand the need of skills in the post COVID situation. The study is focused on the skills required for the employees working in Hospitality sector. The responses were collected from the academicians and the students of hospitality training institutes and the employees from hospitality sector.

A structured questionnaire was formed and floated through Google Forms through the population.

The first section includes demographic information of the respondents. The second section includes the list of skills to be possessed by the employees and the respondents had to rate the importance of skills as per their perception.

Total 40 responses were collected. Analysis of received responses was done with the help of graphs and charts.

The same is presented in the further section of data analysis.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The responses received from teachers teaching in hospitality management institutes and hospitality management graduates and the employees of hospitality industry were the respondents. The data is analysed and presented in the form of graphs and presented as below.

The respondents are working with different educational institutes and organisations in hospitality industry and the students from different hospitality management institutes.

The academicians from institutes like Bharati Vidyapeeth IHMCT, AISSMS' CHMCT, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth were the respondents.

The respondents from hospitality industry are from different organizations like Sheraton Grand Hotel, Capital Restaurant, Hilton, Hyatt Regency, Amby Valley, J W Marriott, One Restaurant & Bar etc.

The respondents rated the skills as per the importance of each skill perceived by them. The analysis if the same is as follows.
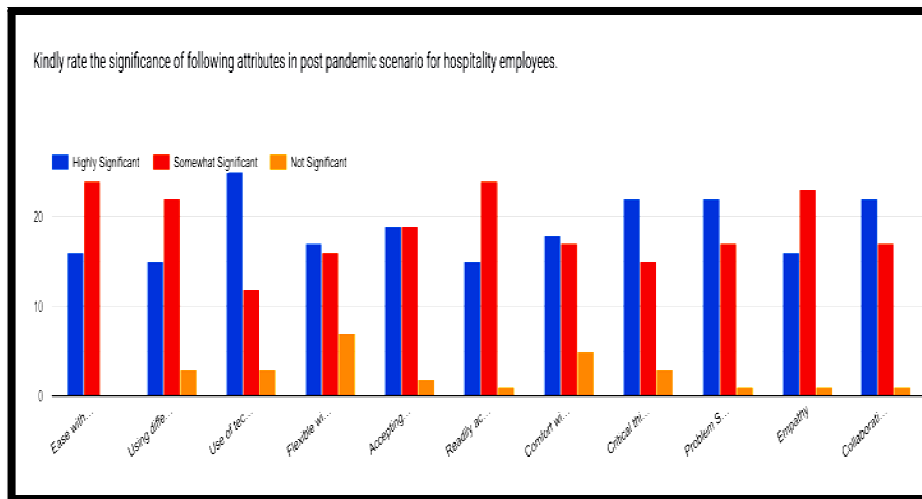
Figure 1

1. As mentioned earlier, this is an era of technology and the current situation, where the services are expected to be contactless, use of software and technology has taken a front seat in daily operations. But only 40% respondents say that the ability to use the software is highly significant and 60% respondents say that the skill is somewhat significant.

2. The technology in the form of various applications is being used at different POS (Point Of Sale) in the hospitality industry. Only 38% respondents state that the skill of using applications at the POS is highly significant and 55% respondents state that it is somewhat significant.

3. Almost one third respondents state that the technology is highly significant for preparing the presentations and remaining respondents feel that it is somewhat significant to be aware of the technology while preparing presentations.

4. Flexibility is an important quality in the current scenario. 43% respondents state that it is highly significant skill and almost same number of respondents that is 40% state that it is somewhat significant and only 17% respondents state that it is not significant.

5. Equal number of respondents feel that accepting change in work profile is highly significant and somewhat significant. And very few respondents feel that it is not significant.

6. Almost one third respondents state that the willingness to accept extra responsibility at workplace is somewhat significant and almost 40% respondents state that the willingness is highly significant and needed in the present state.

7. Almost equal number of respondents opine that being comfortable with changes in work routine or work schedules is highly significant and somewhat significant. It is the need of the hour that the employees should get adapted to the demanding situation.

8. Critical thinking is an analytical skill and much needed in the current market conditions. More than half the respondents feel that this is a most important skill for the employees and 38% respondents feel that it is somewhat important for the employees.

9. Similar results are seen with the problem solving skill. More than half respondents state that it is much required and needed skill for the employees in hospitality sector and 43% respondents state that it is somewhat significant skill for the employees.

10. The pandemic has created quite unrest amongst many people. Being empathetic and understanding others is very crucial, especially for employees working in hospitality organisations. But almost one third respondents feel that it is it is somewhat important to be empathetic whereas 40% respondents feel that being empathetic is quite significant for employees.

11. Collaboration or teamwork is a crucial aspect for any organization. Also, with remote working in many organisations, it has proved to be even more important. More than half the respondents state that it is highly significant skill and 43% respondents state that it is somewhat important skill for the employees.

V. FINDINGS

From the responses it is evident that the post COVID market will be quite demanding in terms of skills to be possessed by the employees. The study is an attempt to understand the essential skills for employees in hospitality sector. Hospitality sector offers services as well as products to the customers. It is therefore essential that the employees working in hospitality sector are expected to have acquired some skills which are necessary to serve the guests and ensure guest satisfaction. The skills considered in the study can be categorized into Technical skills & Soft skills.

The observations and findings are elaborated in the following section.

1. The hospitality sector also uses various software for day-to-day operations. Also there are different POS where the organisations use various applications which can be used with the help of mobile or tablets. It is an essential aspect in today's world that the business involves technology in their operations. But it was quite surprising that majority of the respondents felt that it is not very essential to have knowledge of software and handling different procedures using software. Also, most of the respondents state that the familiarity of handling the applications is not very essential whereas few responses record that these technical skills very important for the employees in hospitality sector.

2. The respondents state that it is beneficial to use the technology for preparing various presentations for clients as a part of marketing activity or even with internal activities like training programs etc. It is an effective tool for demonstrating your thoughts and ideas. Majority of the respondents state that it is very essential to know the skill of presentations.

3. From the literature review, it was clear that apart from technological competence, soft skills will be the key to endurance in any sector for the employees. The responses received from the respondents also affirm the same.

4. The respondents have rated Critical Thinking ability, Problem Solving skill and Collaboration or Teamwork as much essential skills to be possessed by the employees in hospitality sector. It is necessary that the employees working in service industry must have acquired these skills for better service experience for the customers. More than half respondents affirm that the above mentioned skills are very important for the employees and some respondents state that these skills are fairly important for the employees.

5. Next higher rated skills are Accepting Change in Work Profile, Comfort with Changes in Routine/ Schedule at Workplace and being Flexible with Duty Timings. All these aspects and skills are related with Flexibility & Adaptability at professional front. Almost half the respondents state that being ready for any kind of acceptable change at workplace should be easily accepted by the employees. It is crucial for any employees to accept the changes in various forms which will make the professional life easy and may open the path of progress in the same organization or with other organisations.

   Another important skill is being empathetic towards your teammates and the customers. More than half respondents state that this skill is fairly crucial for the employees and almost half the respondents state that this ability is highly important for the employees and much more applicable and relevant to the employees working in hospitality sector.

VI. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a lot of disturbance throughout the world. The global economy had come to standstill for few months. There were lot of changes taking place in the corporate sector, IT sector, manufacturing sector, service sector, travel industry, education sector, in-short, the pandemic had hit all the sectors and changed the style of working of every sector and industry.

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