

Holistic Approach in Imparting Assertive Skill in Engineering Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The rationale of the study is to adopt a holistic approach in designing Engineering English syllabus focusing on the soft skills a collaborative task-based syllabus (CTBS) blended with teacher-directed content-based instruction and student-centered task-based instruction. In this globalization era with advent of new technologies the engineers are expected to explore different mix of skills. Besides his technical proficiency he must also exhibit nontechnical aspects of engineering such as soft skills along with cognitive skills. The Indian economy has become globally interconnected facing a competitive edge and are being pushed to deliver world class product lines and service quality. This gap is due to the way English taught and learned in the classrooms. Traditionally, the most common teaching approach applied in the Engineering English classes is teacher-centered and lecture-oriented. This paper suggests that graduate—level programs must be re—oriented in terms of approaches and methodologies. If endowed with the skill sets and a good knowledge of the workplace environment, upcoming graduates can assure themselves of prospective economic advancement.

Key words: Assertive Skill, Engineering Curriculum, Holistic Approach, Teacher-Centered and Technical English

1.1 Introduction

To cope up with increasingly fierce international competition, engineering students are expected to display an industry specific mix of skill set along with English communication diplomacy. Traditionally, the most common teaching approach adopted in English classrooms is teacher-centered and lecture-oriented. However the syllabus contents with conventional objectives such as grammar and LSRW alone will not prepare an engineering graduate with job readiness. According to Fried-Booth (1996), the project work approach to meet the

difficulties in teaching programs, Theory that we teach in the classroom won't suffice, extended practice should be the priority. It is a must to bridge between the language taught and the fact they acquire. Gereffi [2008:20] opines that Both in China and India engineering graduates face the substantially unemployment inspite of a great corporate demand for their services. Hence, he raises questions on the 'quality' of graduates today. Therefore, there exists a huge gap between the Campus communication environment and corporate communication environment.

According to Langer & Applebee (1987), effective instructional activities allow to enhance more knowledge for learners to express in their own specific ideas. According to Richard Serby, founder of the Geosciences recruiting firm Geo Search, stated that the development of soft skills is critical considering the "intense competition for many available positions. This statement emphasizes on the role of soft skills an important tool in differentiating potential candidates. Thus the organizations and the corporate sectors are looking for potential employees technically proficient backed with soft skills. Dorland's Medical Dictionary states that assertiveness: "It is a form of behavior which is characterized by a confident affirmation of a statement or declaration without need of proof which confirms the person's rights that aggressively threatening the rights of another (assuming a position of dominance). Assertive skill is one of the core communication skills sought nowadays. Psychologists says that if one is assertive is distinguished from being unassertive which implies passive, weak and self-sacrificing or aggressive is self-centered, and arrogantly demanding.

In a work place communicating assertively will gain self-confidence, self-esteem, understand and recognize one's feelings, earn respect from others, improve communication, create win-win situations, improve one's decision-making skills, Create honest relationships and helps to gain more job satisfaction. This will indeed contribute a positive factor in one's employability and career development process.

1.2 Assertiveness - An Introduction

In social and communication skill training assertiveness skill is regularly referred as one of the important aspect of training. Sometimes, assertiveness is wrongly confused with aggression, it is clearly stated that assertive individuals aim to be neither passive nor aggressive in their interactions with other people. The Oxford Dictionary defines

assertiveness as: “Forthright, positive, insistence on the recognition of one's rights.” It stands for one’s personal rights that express thoughts and feelings and also in direct and appropriate ways. At the same time by being assertive we should always respect the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of other people. The concept of assertiveness training was first coined in Manuel J Smith's book *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, published in 1975. This book describes that assertiveness is largely about expressing oneself clearly and resisting manipulation. It states a ten-point 'Bill of Assertive Rights', that is based around one key principle “The right to be the final judge of yourself is the prime assertive right which allows no one to manipulate you.”

1.3 The Bill of Assertive Rights in *I Feel Guilty* reads *When I Say No* :

1. We have the right to judge our own behaviour, thoughts, and emotions.
2. We should take the responsibility for the initiation and consequences ourself.
3. We have the right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying our behaviour.
4. We have the responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
5. We have the right to change your mind.
6. We have the right to make mistakes - and be responsible for them.
7. We have the right to say, No in some situation.
8. We have to be independent of the goodwill of others.
9. We have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
10. We have the right to say, 'I don't understand'.
11. We have the right to say, “I don't care.”

In the competitive world of Professionals, Managers and Executives indeed all the employees of the companies have to communicate effectively. No organization can survive without communication. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (2008) states that Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs, and boundaries has been conceptualized that it has a behavioral middle ground, lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses". The worldwide collaboration enables companies to build their products execute their operations and deliver their products economically and faster. The better they enhance their communication skills the greater are the chances to raise up to the pinnacle of the profession and climb up the ladder of success. In this view communicating assertively will make oneself straightforward, and appropriate Saying the right thing, in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way. Communicating effectively is imperative to reaching goals when

interacting with others. Because communicating assertively is based on mutual respect, it's an effective and diplomatic communication style. In all other interactions with other people, Being assertive shows that one respects oneself because He/she is willing to stand up for his/her interests and express his/her thoughts and feelings. It also demonstrates that he/she is aware of the rights of others and is willing to work on resolving conflicts.

1.4 Techniques involved in Assertiveness skill

In work place scenario , assertiveness facilitates an individual to act in his/her own best wellbeing, to stand up for themselves without excessive anxiety, to express sincere feelings comfortably and to convey personal rights without denying the rights of others. Rich and Schroeder (1976) give the following functional definition of assertive behavior. Assertive behavior is the skill for us to seek and maintain in an interpersonal situation in which we come across an expression of feelings take such risks with loss of reinforcement or even punishment.

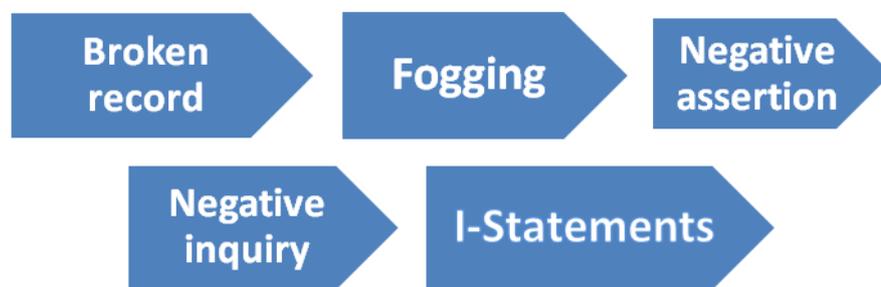


Fig.1.1. Techniques involved in Assertiveness skill

The "broken record" technique implies repetition simply replicating one's requests or refusals every time one met with resistance. Whenever two persons are involved in the conversation, the first person should keep restating the message using the same language over and over again. Ultimately the person is liable to comprehend that you really mean what you are saying. Secondly the Fogging technique comprises of finding some limited truth to agree with in what an antagonist is saying. More particularly, one can agree in part or agree in principle. It also involves training oneself to stay calm in the face of criticism, and agreeing with whatever may be fair and functional in it. It is difficult when someone provoked and upset by criticism, we remove its destructive power. Negative assertion means agreeing with those parts of the criticism that are valid, but without allowing oneself to become consumed by guilt and self-loathing. Negative Enquiry requires a lot of self-confidence. When someone is attacking or criticizing you, you ask them for constructive criticism - ie: what they think

you are doing wrong, and what you could do differently to be better. I-statements could be used to voice out one's feelings and wishes from a personal position. It should be without expressing a judgment about the other person or blaming one's feelings on them.

1.5 Teaching Methodology

Case study methodology can be adopted to teach and train assertive skills. The case study method provides an opportunity for the students to understand issues that confront the business world and develop problem-solving strategies. It helps them to face the real world business paradigms and brings about, through meaningful discussion and quantifiable solutions. Our students need to learn intelligently how to tackle problems and make suitable decisions. When real-life cases are presented in the classroom students will be able to come out with different points of view. Fry et al (1999) describe case studies as complex examples which give an insight into the content of the problem as well as illustrate the major points. Students must learn to solve complex multi faceted real world problems. The case study must be based on the sign posts like challenge, solution result or issue, approach, current situation. According to Doyle (1990) asserted that the purpose of the cases is to make principle or a practice concrete rather than stimulate problem solving. Cases are used as pedagogical tools for helping teachers practice the basic professional processes of analysis, problem solving and decision making. Assertiveness training as a method of personal development grew in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s, and the subject is now taught in many universities and colleges. The students can be given various cases showcasing the importance of assertive skill involved in communicative aspects. In an organization Communication is directly linked to being assertive. Nowadays business scenario demands employees to be rational and logical on which soft skills play a major role. Communicating assertively is one of the commandeer which often makes a deal success or failure.

An example for case pertaining to assertive skills is given below which can be given for discussion in the class room.

Mr. Bernard, Senior Manager X Company tends to be aggressive who is quick to anger. He usually bang his fists on the table when an employee does something wrong. He often treats his employee like children; they tend to harbor a great deal of bitterness. He is always quick to criticize the work and always keen in pointing out the negative aspects of his employees. In contrast, Mr. Shaw, a passive manager is easy to walk over, because he does not take things seriously, the employees also will not take things seriously, and they will

often do what they want despite the company's rules and regulations. A passive manager will typically avoid doing anything with his employees that might cause conflict, as they do not want to disrupt the workings of their department. This type of case can be discussed in the classroom and the teacher should explain on the assertive behavior on emphasizing the need to balance between the two extremes i.e aggressiveness and passiveness.

1.6 Evaluation by students

A questionnaire was circulated among III year Engineering students to evaluate the effectiveness of the Assertiveness skill. It included three measures: innovative, strenuous and redundant. The responses to the questionnaires were decoded in a database. First, each measure was tested to find out whether the Assertive skills were important for the students. The results have been polled. Thirty per cent of the students polled that the soft skills in the present curriculum were innovative, meaningful and relevant. They also commented that they were very easy to comprehend well organized.

The other 20% reported that they were very strenuous because they felt that the assertive skills were complicated and very difficult to comprehend. The rest of the 80% polled that the other skills in the present syllabi looked redundant because they did not focus on real world business issues. Neither were they challenging or practical. This implies that the Assertive Skills in the engineering discipline must be re—oriented, in terms of the objectives so that it focuses on real world scenario.

1.7 Conclusion

Assertive Skills or otherwise called personality traits gives a completeness to the person. It complement the hard skills which are the basic requirements of the job. These skills will enable a person to work effectively and fit in at the organization. Thus this paper suggests the crucial importance of incorporating Assertive Skills and soft skills in the English Engineering syllabus to make our graduates to acquire the necessary skill set to match the demand of the organizations.

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