
Part II

Hard Skills

As the praise for soft skills has increased in recent years, one should not consider hard skills as a thing of the past. Hard skills are still important in professional settings. They are usually the measurable skills that can land you a job because they pertain to intelligence, analytical/technical skills, determination, rigor, vision, and the like. Hard skills have been majorly promoted in past decades, not just in workplaces, but also by Business Schools, and that may be understandable when we consider that B-Schools receive their directives from the work environment.

With such a high number of hard skill-educated graduates in leadership positions today, it may not be so easy to convince them that they should balance their behavior, and include some more empathy, motivation, and social skills in their supervisory roles. But “not easy” is not the same as “impossible.” It just requires appropriate tact to get the overly hard skill-oriented leaders to consider a blend of hard and soft skills in their approaches toward internal and external stakeholders. Many leaders, who have patted themselves on the back for years about their “no-nonsense” approach of intelligence, vision, and rational decision-making, still feel that soft skills should not have a place in the workplace, and resist any coaching in that regard, even though they really want to do a good job. The idea that empathy and its related behaviors should stay out of the work floor is just too deeply embedded in their system, even if they are told about the results that such a shift in behavior would bring, and learn about successful companies that included soft skills in their leadership strategies. These leaders will find an explanation for any evidence presented to them about the need to include more soft skills. If, for instance, a survey is done among their employees and the findings show that they should apply more soft skills, they will either accuse the survey instrument, the participants, or the data analysts of poor quality or performance.

Interestingly, the best approach to convince these leaders about the appropriateness of using soft skills is by using soft skills toward them: approaching them with empathy and using emotional intelligence when confronting them with their leadership flaws. The way to do so is avoid confrontations where others are present, but rather gently do so in one-on-one settings, so that their pride does not get hurt. It is most important to win the trust of these leaders, so that they can gradually adopt the

idea that they have to change their behavior. An important point to consider is that these leaders have a fear of failure, just like most of us. A good approach is to invite them to reflect on approaches in their past where they successfully applied soft skills, so that they can relate to those on the path forward.

All that being said, hard skills still maintain their place of importance in professional settings. In the next few chapters, we will proudly present hard skills, and do so as follows:

1.1 Leadership and Ambition

Ambition is the driving motive to reach beyond what is considered possible. It is therefore a leadership skill that cannot be denied. This chapter will discuss the importance of nurturing one's ambition, but will also underscore the reasons why ambition needs to be examined regularly to prevent from becoming victimized by it.

1.2 Leadership and Global Understanding

Ignorance is one of the greatest enemies of leaders. With seven billion people communicating with each other on a continuously increasing scale, leaders cannot refrain from understanding phenomena as cultures, traditions, general values, and other aspects of importance. While nothing has to be learned by heart, awareness in this aspect can be a lifesaver.

1.3 Leadership and Information Technology

The hard skill of information technology is one that cannot be ignored in an ever-communicating world. This chapter will focus on some developments in the field of IT that leaders, whether savvy in that regard or not, need to be aware of. Some advantages and pitfalls of IT implementation will also be reviewed.

1.4 Leadership and Planning

Planning is the measurable aspect of vision and problem solving, which were presented earlier. This chapter will explain why leaders need to examine the status quo on a regular basis, so that they can start thinking about and working toward new directions, and thus remain leaders.