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## **Soft Skills & Personality Development training program enhancing the productivity of Audio-related Media Professionals.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the success rate of a unique soft skill & personal skills development program conducted along with the technical course of Sound Engineering modules, in a Mumbai (India) based Audio-education related Media institute namely, Soundideaz Academy. 105 audio-related media professionals, who had graduated from the institute in the past 10 years, responded to the rating scale-based survey. This case study & quantitative analysis-based research proves the importance of soft-skills, like Communication Skills, Time Management, Team Building, Emotions Management, Stress Management, Assertiveness Management etc, other than the audio related topics, in contributing to the 'holistic' development of an audio related Media Professional.

### **1. Introduction**

Media industry is not just about art & technology. Rather we see the functioning of an interactive kaleidoscope that brings together the elements of art, technology & human mind for the execution of every media project. How much ever the Media industry keeps advancing with ever upgrading 'state of the art' technological tools, still what will always stay constant is the human & emotional element in delivering the necessary work. The stresses of deadlines, the pressure of competition, the 'glamor' of fame and many psychological and social stimuli can overwhelmingly tip the balance of a talented artist or a technician. Recent global reports of increasing suicide and drug overdose related

death rates among Media professionals, particularly musicians, are alarming (6) (Chester Bennington, Avicci, Keith Flint etc.), which should raise an alarm for Media professionals and educationists to design curriculum which is inclusive of life skills management, along with the usual technical modules. It is a research proven fact that, better the development & application of soft skills, higher would be the Emotional Quotient to deal with oneself and to manage the people around. (1) Thus, for success in the Media related profession, it is the need of the hour that educators develop curriculums that blend modules that enhance the technical, artistic, soft skills & personal development skills sets of students pursuing a Media career.

In the year 2017, a research paper presented by Dr. Doug Bielmeier, at the 143rd Convention of Audio Engineering Society (AES) at New York, highlights the value of soft skills and personal skills training in the life of audio professionals (2). The following research explores the quality of an audio education program, which practically has been executing what Dr. Doug Bielmeier has highlighted in his landmark research. With a vision to empower students with skills sets that will help them maintain a good work-life balance during their professional life, a Mumbai based audio education institute namely Soundideaz Academy, has been conducting a unique educational program since its establishment in 2010. So far, the only one in India, the program aims towards 'holistic' development of students, where both, Sound Engineering related technical skills and personal development based soft skills training is included. In the 1-year Diploma program, the primary objective of the institute's educational model is to simultaneously encourage the students to develop their 'Intelligence Quotient' (I.Q) related to Audio sciences and equally encourage them to develop their Emotional Quotient (E.Q) which will take care of their 'emotional well-being' while dealing with the pressures of work-life balance during their professional journey. In the program, every student simultaneously undergoes two types of training. 1) Technical (Theory & Practical) training regarding Sound Engineering (either Studio or 'Live') & Music Production, & 2) Soft Skills & Personality Development based training which aims to groom the student's overall personality to face the ups and downs of a Media related career.

In this study we investigate the nature of the soft skill and personality development related program conducted by Soundideaz Academy over a decade & its effectiveness as reported by the ex-students of the academy, who are now successful audio-related media professionals in the entertainment businesses of India.

## 2. Background & Literature Review

At the 143<sup>rd</sup> Convention of AES at New York in 2017, a paper, titled- Audio Education: 'Audio Recording & Production Students, Report Skills Learned or Focused on in Their Programs', was presented & published by Dr Doug Bielmeier from Purdue School of Engineering and Technology, IUPUI, in the Journal of the Audio Engineering Society. The paper evaluates the Audio Recording & Production (ARP) Program and reports that students who took the training found that though the technical aspects of the programs were up to the mark, what was missing from the program was inclusion of communication skills & personal skills. Observing the research done from 1978 to 2014, Dr Bielmeier reports in his 2017 based research that employers in the professional audio industry observed that audio graduates are not groomed on people skills and lack communication skills, which eventually lead to distress and blunders at the workplace. Though educators at formal ARP programs agree that customer relations and studio protocol were important behavioral skill sets, still research confirms that there is a lack of social and communication skills among new entrants of audio professionals (2)

Yet another research presented by Paul Vandemast- Bell, Duncan Werner & John Crossley at the 26<sup>th</sup> AES UK Conference of Audio Education in 2015, which highlights the need of educating the fresh audio & music professionals to be equipped with good interpersonal skills that will help them face the difficult realities of media industry. The researchers from University of Derby, UK reported that Universities agree that such interpersonal skills should be included in the curriculum, but none have so far implemented any program that would help the aspirant of audio/music career to be groomed 'holistically' (3)

Research conducted by Harvard University, Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research

Centre has all concluded that 85% job success comes from having well-developed soft and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills) (1918). This shows that soft skills have been identified as critically important for workplace success for more than 100 years! (8)

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Data Collection

##### Stage 1

From the 10-year records of ex-students of Soundideaz Academy, current working professionals in the Sound & Music industry of India, were identified and tracked.

##### Stage 2

A 25-items based Survey questionnaire was designed to seek feedback from selected ex-students, about the current effectiveness of the soft skill and personality development training, which they received at the academy.

##### Stage 3

A web-based online survey via email was conducted on 200 ex-students who had graduated in the past 10 years, and who are currently working as audio and music professionals in Mumbai/India based Media industry. 105 out of 200 ex-students responded.

#### 3.2 Instrument

Besides conducting personal interviews with the authorities of Soundideaz Academy, a 25-item Survey questionnaire titled - 'Impact of Soft Skills & Personality Development training Program in Audio related Media Career' was designed using Google Forms App. The questionnaire was designed in a manner where the respondents had to mark their responses on 3 & 5-point Likert Scales based ratings.

### 4. Data Analysis

#### 4.1 Demographic Data:

- **Age:** Average age of the audio professionals is 26 years.
- **Job description:** 24.8% of the respondents were Sound Engineers (Studio), 20% were Musicians, 11.4% were 'Live Sound Engineers, 10.5% were Professional Singers, 5.7% were Sound Designers, 6.7% were Mix Engineers, 1.9% were Technical Set Up experts and 19% marked 'Other' as their job roles.
- **Work experience:** 28.3% had above 5 years of industry experience, 9.1 % reported 4 years of experience, 12.1 % reported 3 years of work experience, 23.2 % reported 2 years of work experience and 27.3% reported 1 year of work experience.

#### 4.2 Methods used for Data Analysis:

- The ratings of 105 ex-students were evaluated with a Quantitative research approach in the form of Mean (Averages) & Percentages.
- The subjective responses of student's & authorities of the academy too were considered while data analysis & interpretation.

## 5.Results

Sr. No	Psychological Variables Levels	Mean Value
1	Stress	2.8
2	Motivation	4
3	Job Satisfaction	3.9

Mean (Average) Value: 1= Extremely Low, 2 = Low, 3= Moderate, 4 = High, 5 = Extremely High (n=105)

**Table 1. Mean (Average) values of ex-students Ratings of Psychological Variables**

Sr. No	Sources of Stress Reported by Ex-Students.	Percentage
1	Dealing with Difficult clients	33.3%
2	Dealing with Difficult work colleagues	26.3%
3	Not getting due recognition for one's work	25.3%
4	Media related politics	24.2%
5	Cut-throat competition	22.2%
6	Poor equipment & technical issues	22.2%
7	Dealing with difficult seniors	21.2%
8	Health Issues	21.2%
9	Miscellaneous	18.2%
10	Project completion deadlines	4%

**Table 2. Sources of Stresses (in Percentage) reported by by ex-students.**

Sr. No	Effective Soft Skills Application at current workplace	Mean Value
1	Time Management	4.1
2	Assertiveness Management	4
3	Communication Skills	4.1
4	Emotions Management	4
5	Stress Management	3.8
6	Creativity Management	3.9
7	Client Management	4.02
8	Team Management	4.03

Mean (Average) Value: 1= Extremely Poor, 2 = Poor, 3= Moderate, 4 = Good, 5 = Extremely Good (n=105)

**Table 3. Mean (Average) ratings of ex-students indicating effective application of specific soft skills at the current workplace.**

Sr. No	Popular soft skills training modules at Soundideaz Academy	Percentage
1	Communications Skills	74.3%
2	Emotions Management	68.6%
3	Stress Management	67.6%
4	Assertiveness Management	64.8%
5	Relationship Management	61.9%
6	Time Management	61.8%
7	Work-Life Balance	50.5%
8	Creativity Management	41%

**Table 4. Status of Popular Soft-Skills topics (in Percentage) appreciated by ex-students during their training.**

Sr. No	Value reported by ex-students by application of Soft Skills & Personality Development training in their Media career	Percentage
1	Positive Attitude	77.5%
2	To make the best of the opportunity	55.9%
3	Enjoy work inspite of adversities	54.9%
4	Confidence to face & fight fears	53.9%
5	Can manage difficult clients	48%
6	Open to seek knowledge	40.2%
7	Have become a better team player	32.4%
8	Finance	13.7%

**Table 5. Values reported by ex-students (in Percentage) by application of Soft Skills & Personality Development training in their Media career**

Sr. No	Program Relevance Status.	Mean Value
1	Is Soft Skills/Personality Development training received in Sound Engineering course helping you manage your Media career?	4.2

Mean (Average) Value: 1= Not Much, 2 = A little, 3= To good extent, 4 = Very much, 5 = Extremely helpful. It has contributed to my overall confidence levels at work (n=105)

**Table 6. Mean (Average) values of ex-students Ratings of their feedback to the Program Relevance of the Soft Skills & Personality Development**

training received during their Diploma period.

Sr. No	Program Satisfaction Status	Mean Value
1	Are you Satisfied receiving the Soft Skills/Personality Development Training?	4.6

Mean (Average) Value: 1= Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3= Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied (n=105)

**Table 7. Mean (Average) values of ex-students Ratings of levels of satisfaction for receiving soft- skills & personality development training during their technical course.**

Sr. No	Training Program Productivity Status.	Mean Value
1	Is the holistic program (soft skills + technical skills) received in your training contributing to your current work productivity?	2.8

(Evaluation based on 3-point Likert Scale response) Mean (Average) Value: 1= No, not at all, 2 = Its helpful, 3= Yes, Certainly, it has made a positive difference! (n=105)

**Table 8. Mean (Average) values of ex-students Ratings of associating soft-skills & personality development training to their current work productivity.**

## 6. Limitations.

The study has been conducted on a sample size of 105 audio-related media professionals. More sample size will provide more clarity, consistency & evidence about the value of soft skills and personality development training in increasing the work productivity of audio professionals.

## 7. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the nature and effectiveness of the soft skills and personality development program that Soundideaz Academy, Mumbai, India, has been conducting, simultaneously with Sound Engineering & Music Production related training program, since the time of its establishment in 2010.

### 7.1 Nature of the Soft-Skill and Personality Development Program:

From interview-based data collected from the authorities of Soundideaz Academy, the nature and scope of the soft skill-based modules were investigated. As informed by the authorities, every batch of 1 year Diploma in Sound Engineering course has to mandatorily undergo soft skills & personal development training so that the students are groomed on 'Mind Management' related skills, which the academy believes will help the students in dealing with work pressures, client management & above all keep them motivated in times of adversities. The institute has collaborated with a consulting Psychologist to develop & conduct a customized certified program in Personality Development. The program is based on the objective that every student who graduates from the academy must be psychologically equipped to combat the stress and strain that the media industry has to offer.

The 35-session Personality Development program covers modules related to Fundamentals of Mind Management, Stress Management, Time Management, Team Building, Creativity Management, Client & Personal Relationship Management, Communication Skills Management, Assertiveness Management,

Work-Life Balance Management, Emotions Management with special emphasis to Fear & Anger Management are included in the curriculum. Practical demonstrations, Philosophical discussions, Audio-Visual tools & lecture methods are used in helping the students groom their soft skills, character & Emotional Intelligence.



*Figure 1. Students engaged in Motivation & Team Building exercise in the Soft-Skill & Personality Development training program at Soundideaz Academy (SIA).*

This helps in developing their overall personality in conjunction with developing their audio related technical skills. There is a separate evaluation done at the end of the Diploma for the Personality Development modules. Besides the Sound Engineering Certification, the students are awarded with a separate Personality Development oriented certification that validates their soft skills and personality development status, as a result of the training received at the academy.

### 7.2 Effectiveness of the Soft-Skill and Personality Development Program:

The quantitative analysis based on Mean (Average) & Percentage values gives insight to the effectiveness of the Soft-Skill & Personality

Development Program conducted at Soundideaz Academy.

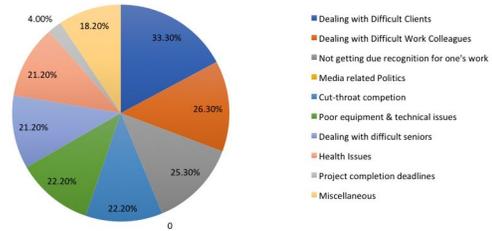
The data presented in *Table 1* depicts Average ratings of ex-students regarding their current Stress, Motivation and Job Satisfaction levels. The average rating of ‘Stress experienced’ is 2.8 which indicates Low or Moderate levels of Stress. The Mean rating value of current Motivation level experienced by the ex-students is 4, which indicates that, on an average the ex-students have reported High level of Motivation in their chosen audio related work. The ex-student’s current Job Satisfaction related average rating score is 3.9 which indicates High levels.



*Figure 2. Students of SIA engaged in Stress Management exercise in their Soft-Skills training program.*

Given the sources of stress reported by the respondents, namely ‘dealing with difficult seniors, clients & work colleagues’, ‘dealing with Media related politics’, ‘Cut-throat competition’, ‘not getting due recognition’ etc. (*Ref Table no. 2*) the Moderate stress, High Motivation and Job Satisfaction experienced by the ex-students is a clear marker that the Soft-Skill & Personality Development training received by them is making a positive difference in coping with the work pressures.

**Figure 3. Sources of Work Stress (In Percentage) reported by ex-students at SIA**



*Table 3* presents Mean (Average) ratings of ex-students indicating effective application of specific soft skills at the current workplace. The Top 5 soft skills which seem to be most beneficial are Time Management (Mean= 4.1), Communication Skills (Mean =4.1), Assertiveness Management (Mean = 4), Emotions Management (Mean = 4) & Team Management (Mean= 4.03). The Mean values indicate that the ex-students see the effectiveness of the aforesaid soft skills at a ‘Good level’.

*Table 4* depicts the results (in Percentage) of the most popular soft skills training modules at SIA, which the ex-students think, are helping them in their current work scenario. The Top 5 Soft-Skills based popular modules being: 1) Communication Skills (73.3%) 2) Emotions Management (68.6%) 3) Stress Management (67.6%) 4) Assertiveness Management (64.8%) & 5) Relationship Management (61.9%)

**Figure 4. Status of Popular Soft-Skills topics (in Percentage) appreciated by ex-students during their training.**

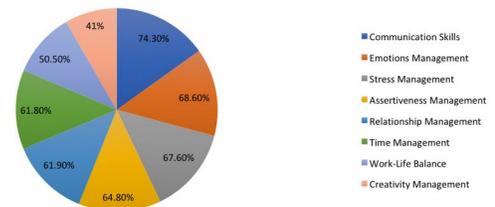
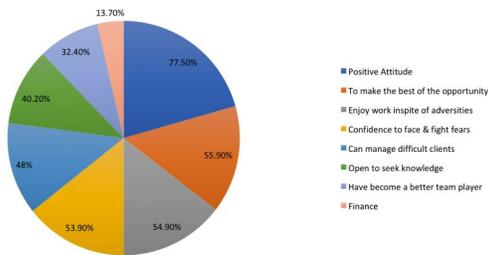




Figure 5. 'Wishful Meditation' technique for generating Positive Energy demonstrated in Soft-Skill & Personality Development training at SIA.

Table 5 exhibits the percentage values of ex-student expressing the value they see in undergoing the Soft Skill and Personality Development program during their training period. 77.5% of the ex-students reported that by undergoing soft-skills and personality development training in their Diploma course, they have gained 'Positive Attitude' to carry on with their struggle. 55.9% reported that they have learnt to 'make best of the opportunities', 54.9% reported that they enjoy their work in spite of adversities', 53.9% reported that can face and fight their fears, 48% reported that they 'can manage difficult clients', 40.2% reported that they have become 'open to seek knowledge', 32.4 % reported that they 'have become better team player and 13.7% reported that they have gained 'Finance'.

Figure 6. Values reported by ex-students (in Percentage) by application of Soft Skills & Personality Development training in their Media career



With reference to Table no. 6, it is observed that the Mean (Average) obtained for the ratings given to the question- "Is Soft Skills/Personality Development training received in Sound Engineering course helping you manage your Media career?" is 4.2 thus indicating that the Soft Skills/Personality Development training is 'Very Much' proving to be helping the ex-students in their Media career, thus confirming on the relevance of the program.



Figure 7. Students working in teams while practicing Pro-Tools at SIA laboratory

With reference to Table no. 7, it is observed that the Mean (Average) obtained for the ratings given to the question "Are you Satisfied receiving the soft skills/Personality Development Training?" is 4.6 thus indicating that the ex-students are 'Very Much' satisfied with their Soft Skills/Personality Development training which they received during their 1-year Diploma training program at SoundideazAcademy.

With reference to Table no. 8, it is observed that the Mean (Average) obtained for the ratings given to the question "Is the holistic program (soft skills +

technical skills) received in your training contributing to your current work productivity?” is 2.8 thus indicating that the ex-students are finding it ‘Helpful’ and feel it has certainly made a positive difference for them, towards their holistic professional grooming & their current work productivity.

All in all, the Mean & Percentage values derived out of the ratings given by the institute’s 105 ex-students (who are now budding & some are successful audio and music professionals), acts as evidence to the success of the program.

Besides this, based on data procured from personal interviews of the key authorities of SoundIdeaZ Academy, it has been found that, the inclusion of this unique soft skill and personality development training program, is based on the vision of Senior Sound Engineer of India and the Founder-Director of SoundIdeaZ Academy Dr.Pramod Chandorkar. Given his vast media industry experience, Dr. Chandorkar, believes that ‘even the best of talents of the audio and music industry will fail if they lack communication skills and the apt soft skills & personality traits to manage media related ups and down, especially when one is a fresh professional in an ever-demanding Media industry.’ A research paper titled – ‘Are audio education programs keeping pace with new developments in industry?’ (2013) authored by David Scheirman, had highlighted what Dr. Chandorkar believes. (4) Based on Dr. Chandorkar’s vision, the Sound Engineering course’s curriculum of the academy, gives equal importance towards grooming the audio/music industry related Intelligence Quotient (I.Q) as well as Emotional Quotient (E.Q) of the students. (1)

Mentorship is yet another value the academy has adopted from an ancient traditional education system. Since ancient times Indian Civilization has been encouraging the ‘Guru-Shishya Parampara’ (5) (Mentor-Mentee tradition) where the ‘Guru’ (Mentor) is just not a medium of educating technical knowledge, but he/she is responsible to shape the character of the ‘Shishya’ (Mentee) too. Soundideaz Academy is fundamentally based on this ancient education system of India. The academy thus has

revived an Indian ancient cultural trend in educating the aspiring audio and music professionals of modern times. Teachers at the academy play their respective roles of a mentor and educate the students just not about the technical skills related to audio & music, but also help them groom their character and personality by training them on soft skills & personal skills so that they are well-equipped to self-regulate their emotions and thereby face the ups and downs of personal & professional life after they successfully graduate. (7)



Figure 8. Prof. Shraddha. Sankulkar mentoring the students of SIA on developing their Soft-Skills & overall Personality.

## 8.Challenges.

Audio educators are seen encouraging the students to upgrade on their technical knowledge related Intelligence Quotient (I.Q), but there is almost nil or low effort taken to design programs to improve on their soft skills and thereby eventually upgrade on their work-related Emotional Intelligence (E.Q). The result of this study shows affirmative trends about the success of a program that focuses on holistic development of the student. Audio and music educators thus need to brainstorm and design standardized curriculums that will cover both technical & soft-skills training, particularly communications skills, team management, stress management and emotions management etc. so that studio etiquettes, catching up with deadlines, managing cut-throat competition and other pressures of the Media industry can be managed

healthily. Cultural and professional expectations of specific media industries have to be taken into account while designing the soft skills and personality development curriculum of a holistically intended audio education program.



*Figure 9. Dr. Pramod Chandorkar, Founder-Director of Soundideaz Academy teaching Film Post production Workflows to the students.*

With reference to the subjective reports of the ex-students that were surveyed, it is observed that clients and collaborators have been appreciating their work just not for their audio related technical skills but they also are been acknowledge for their soft skills like Time Management, Communication Skills, Emotions Management Skills, Assertiveness Management skills. As a result, they are re-hired because of their holistic grooming. This holistic grooming is just not helping the full-time employed audio engineers/music professional, but as observed, it is more so ever helping the freelancer audio professionals, who are on their own to fetch projects. This hints that compensation & opportunity wise thus, there are high chances that a holistically groomed audio professional may have an upper hand to be in demand for his services, which the audio educators need to keep in mind while developing 'Employability' potentials of the students they are training.

## 9. Conclusions.

The investigation and results obtained in this study affirmatively confirms the effectiveness of the soft skills & personality development training program conducted at Soundideaz Academy. The holistic approach adopted by the academy, where both technical and soft skills are equally valued, is proving to be instrumental in achieving good levels of productivity among the audio professionals who have passed out of the academy. The program is very much on the lines of what Dr. Doug Bielmeier & Paul Vandemast- Bell et al. had observed & recommended in their respective AES Conference Papers. (2, 3) Given the ever-increasing competition and unpredictable conditions that prevail in the Media industry, it is the need of the hour that audio educators consider the inclusion of soft skills and personal development modules in existing curriculum of audio related training program. Such initiatives certainly will prove to be promising enough for the professional and psychological well-being of the students after they enter the Media industry.

## 10. Acknowledgements

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