



Survival Skills in a Complex World

Academic institutions and professional training organizations need to impart planning, analytical, communication skills, build self confidence in youth to face future challenges



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As the coronavirus changes its strategy to being a highly transmissible one exhibiting nimbleness, it teaches us an important lesson—being flexible and nimble. The past 18 months of this stressful situation has taught us valuable survival skills. To find a solution to a complicated problem these days, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary.

Say in the case of developing vaccines against Covid-19, a team of talented scientists from varied fields such as recombinant DNA technology, epidemiology, virology, and pharmaceutical

science have to put in hard and collective work. More importantly, good communication skills are needed from people in health agencies, policy making bodies and different government departments to have an effective vaccine execution.

In other words, in addition to field specific subject matter expertise, soft skills are needed. Academic institutions, professional training organizations and in-house educational set-ups such as those that are now promoted by big corporates have to endeavor to impart additional skills such as:

1. Building self-confidence;
2. Understanding and analyzing a situation;
3. Planning and executing solutions;
4. Futuristic thinking and
5. Effective communication.



Technical and Soft Skills

Field specific training such as medicine, engineering science, and management are all needed for gaining financial independence and security, in addition, soft and analytical skills are the need of the hour. For the past four decades or so, higher education institutes have done a tremendous job in imparting professional skills. While this is a great starting point, global problems, as is evident with the current Covid-19, growing climate change scenario, need for more resources to feed a growing population warrant different approaches and varied skill sets. Modular and flexible higher education as practiced in liberal arts system may be one approach.

“We have to balance the teaching of technical skills and discipline-specific knowledge with more general but equally important skills like critical thinking, along with writing and speaking skills and experiences, and the ability to work effectively in team settings. Fortunately, those things aren’t mutually exclusive in the classroom,” stated Professor Ronald Hendrick, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Texas Tech University.

Covid-19- An Eye Opener

Global leaders are struggling to convince some sections of their society to get vaccinated. Scientists are trying their best to convince the society about major issues such as global warming, opioid addiction, obesity problems, plastic pollution, etc. In order to make the policy makers and public understand the ramifications of these complex issues, they need to have engagement and outreach skills.

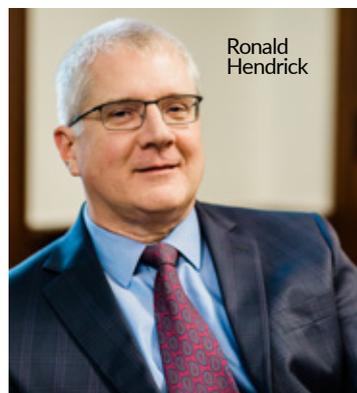
In US universities, recently emphasis is being given to research



and education activities that involve outreach and engagement. Some incentives such as awards and consideration in tenure and promotion are support efforts that are in vogue in U.S. academic institutions. Scientists and technologists need to be global citizen scholars. Professional curriculum needs to be revamped to enhance problem solving and communication skills. Comprehensive universities in North American and European continents enable this task easier due to the availability of such courses in one campus. In fact, some universities have engineering, medical school,

college of science, business school and law college all under one system.

“I like to say that there are technical skill sets that are part of every individual profession; to become an Accountant, a Chemical Engineer, a Forestry Manager. But there are also higher-level cognitive skill sets that apply to all professions and can enhance not only the success of an individual in that profession in terms of their career, but also the value of the kind of work that they are doing in that profession,” stated David Perlmutter, Dean, College of Media & Communication, Texas Tech University.



Collaboration

In university systems, where such facilities are not under the control of one system, collaborative understandings must be made. Such agreements will be particularly helpful for Indian engineering institutions and medical schools as these remain separated in most cases both geographically and system wise, unlike in American and European scenarios. From a practical point of view, these days fields like biomedical



engineering, entrepreneurship are multidisciplinary in nature, which involve seamless interaction between engineering and medical disciplines; business and engineering fields, to name a few. Interaction among students and faculty in such varied fields not only enriches them with broader understanding of multiple fields but also with ability to work with people of different thinking and expertise to solve global problems.

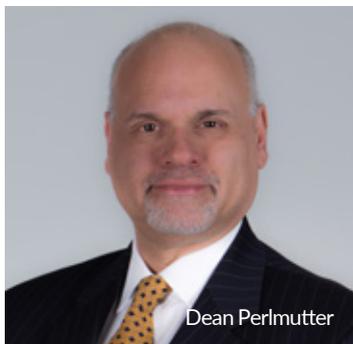
A recognizable positive outcome of Covid-19 has been bringing people together for the welfare of the entire world. Indian culture and the traditional educational values have insisted on global welfare as is expressed in the phrases such as, "Vasuda Eva Kutumbakam" and "Krunvantho Visvam Aryam." Contemporary education should reemphasize values such as global citizenship caring for the welfare of the entire world including flora and fauna.

"Education institutes should make a concerted effort to reevaluate their curriculum and include five critical contents, including (a) ethics, (b) leadership, (c) technology, (d) diversity and inclusion, and (e) international perspectives in all their courses.

Most universities now focus on incorporating individual courses to cover these contents; however, it will be more effective if these perspectives are included in most of the courses in a program, thus preparing students for the global needs," emphasized Professor Mayukh Dass, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs



Mayukh Dass



Dean Perlmutter

and Research, Rawls College of Business, Texas Tech University.

Effective Communication

Finally, effective communication, negotiating skills, being reasonable and not being argumentative are valuable skills, which are needed to be successful in the complex world here resources are in short supply. Engagement and communication can be gained not only by taking formal courses, but also by self-learning. Dean Perlmutter agrees, "Students can increase their communication skills by taking classes but also by practicing. We live in an era where everyone has access to the ability to create communication content and to try to reach audiences."

Being accommodative and understanding the needs and wants of others are very important life skills, which help both personally and professionally. "I think it's also important to take away an understanding of how things like political affiliations, health or technology inequities, geography, global mobility, and the like influence how people are affected by, and respond to, events like Covid-19. It's unfortunate that we've seen people across the full political spectrum try to use the pandemic to political advantage, to demonize others, or to advance other agendas, instead of trying to find some common ground to limit harm of all types – physical, economic, and social - to our fellow human beings. We have to lead from the center, not the fringes," stated Provost Hendrick.

Life is a journey, which insists that we evaluate the course of our travel as we move along. Training, life experience, effective communication and engagement with the society are important survival skills, which have become important in the even changing complex world. 