

Assessment of Work Ethic - Possible and Necessary

by
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Abstract

In today's information age with its technological advances and growing competition, an employee's ability to work in a team has gained importance. As a result, 'Work Ethic' is valued highly at the workplace and identifying employees with good work ethic has become crucial in current business environment. If work ethic is such an important factor at the work place, then its foundation needs to be built upon early. Like any other academic or non - academic skill; it needs to be taught, developed and objectively assessed in schools.

This paper presents the components of 'Work ethic' and describes a 'Case study' for achieving an objective and quantitative assessment of work ethic. It showcases the advantages of and brings out the difficulties involved in quantitative assessment of work ethic in schools.

Assessment of Work Ethic

Documented evidence over a term about a student's subject knowledge and the skills acquired in that subject are the ingredients that feed into a student's assessment record in school, leading to a subject-wise academic term grade. Thus, assessment of knowledge and skills is commonplace. In addition, a class teacher normally does undertake a broad assessment of a student's attitude towards teachers, school property, peers, school programs and schoolwork. Presently, such assessment of the qualities of a student is a reflection of the class teacher's perception formed during the limited contact time she may have had with a student spread over the entire school term and may be supplemented by reports from other teachers. Such a report on the students' attitude tends to be summative and subjective with information often difficult to ascertain.

It is now well understood that developing a sound work ethic at school level can play a vital role in building students for the present day competitive workplace. For such assessment to be meaningful, it needs to be quantitative, in a large measure, which is both difficult and complex. However, it was felt that attitude towards work or 'Work Ethic' can be substantially quantifiable if each subject teacher using a common format that reduces subjectivity substantially does assessment regularly.

Bridging the Work Ethic gap between Schools and Industry

Work place success depends not only on academic grades, but other components such as work ethic. Employers find it easy to identify a candidate with good content knowledge and skills since they have a record of academic scores from schools to go by. They argue that while additional knowledge required by an employee can be learnt, they want employees who have the right work ethic as it plays a vital role in

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their overall performance . For the latter, there is a lack of documentary evidence in the school records. Thus it is clear that every effort should be made to bridge this gap through objective documentation of work ethic at the school level.

What are the components of Work Ethic?

At the workplace, employers are looking for increased productivity, promptness, dependability and positive contributions to team work. These components of work ethic can be directly translated into work ethic components at school level as under:

Productivity or output per head can be translated into assignment output of the student. Promptness would mean being punctual not only for school, but to be on time for all classes during the day. Dependability is a crucial factor at the workplace, which at the school level would be to take responsibility for work missed when absent and also take responsibility for doing the necessary reading tasks and come prepared to school. The last factor of positive contributions in a team, would translate into demonstrating a positive attitude in class and being an active participant.

Having established a direct connection between work ethic components in school and at the workplace, it is time to discuss whether these components can be measured objectively and thereby largely overcome the degree of subjectivity that tends to inevitably creep into this form of assessment.

Can Work Ethic be measured objectively?

For assessment of work ethic, we first examined the extent to which each work ethic component could be measured and the documentation required for this purpose as given in Table 1. Among the three components of work ethic mentioned above, the only truly subjective one was to measure a students' positive contribution in class.

To enable a teacher to quantify a student's work ethic we identified attributes, which could define both positive and non positive attitudes:

Positive attitude indicators:

- (i) A student actively participates in any discussions
- (ii) Is interested in the discussion and listens to peers

Non-positive behavior can take the following forms:

- (i) A student disrupts the attention of others in a class
- (ii) A student is quietly disinterested in class.

In India, many students attend coaching classes after school hours. These classes prepare students for subject content knowledge. Such students may not be disruptive, but they may not be positive contributors to class discussions as they are confident of achieving a high academic grade because of the extra coaching.

Case Study

For our case study, a work ethic assessment form (refer Table 2) was developed and introduced in grade 10. This was a pilot study and the group size was 23 students. This form was used to record each student's performance under following four components of work ethic:

- Handing in assignments
- Preparedness
- Responsibility
- Attitude

To make the task of documentation easier, teachers were required only to fill out any aberrations in a student's performance i.e. if a student had a blank form at the end of term, it meant that the student had an excellent work ethic score. The form therefore assumed that all students had excellent work ethic assessment score unless recorded otherwise by the teacher. This form was given to all subject teachers who had to meticulously document their observations for all students. While some schools do have work ethic assessment forms, details as to why a particular score was awarded are normally absent. To ensure complete transparency, details had to be recorded on the form, preferably in the presence of the respective students.

Findings from the Case Study

Statistical Output

- ❖ 82% of students had consistent (either good or poor work ethic) across subjects. 18% of students had good work ethic assessment scores in the subjects they liked, but had low ratings in the subjects they did not like or did not wish to pursue in the future.
- ❖ 20% of students showed no co-relationship between work ethic assessment and academic scores.
- ❖ 95% of the teachers were unsure about how to help the 20% students who demonstrated no co-relationship between work ethic assessment and academic scores.

Teacher Observations

All teachers meticulously followed instructions in respect of documentation. At the meeting which was called to discuss the outcome of this exercise; the following interesting observations emerged:

- ❖ Some students had a high academic grade in a particular subject, but poor work ethic score in that subject. Teachers found it difficult to explain to such students the need of including their work ethic assessment grades in the report. Students felt that they had met the necessary academic criteria and it should not matter if they were occasionally late to class or had not caught up with work missed, when their final academic grade was impeccable.
- ❖ Teachers felt that if a student had an excellent work ethic but this was not translating into excellent academic performance then it would be difficult to explain this situation to parents and students. The question often raised in this kind of situation was of a possibility that such students may feel discouraged because in spite of making the top grade in work ethic, they have not be able to achieve a higher academic grade and whether this could lead to frustration and low morale amongst students.
- ❖ Students would not take the work ethic grade seriously, if it was not recorded on official school reports and was not given weightage in the overall assessment.

Student Observation

- ❖ 95% of students, who were asked about the 'A' segment (refer Table 3), felt that having work ethic assessment on school records would help them get admissions into universities and then later this record would help at the work place. Universities, who presently might not look at an applicant with marginally low academic scores, may be inclined to admit such students if the school provided them with tangible information regarding the students' good work ethic score.

Taking teacher and student feedback into account, the subject was deliberated amongst the work ethic assessment committee members. The form was accordingly revised and the one currently in place is as given in Table 2.

Challenges in measurement of Work Ethic

Firstly, for work ethic assessment to be effective, every subject teacher would have to document daily if a student came unprepared to class or did not catch up with work missed. If the teacher did not maintain such a record meticulously, then a component of subjectivity would creep into the assessment. It therefore increased teacher documentation load.

Secondly, feedback on work ethic assessment for each subject should be conveyed to students on a regular basis. It was feared that while this would certainly help in improving work ethic in class, valuable teaching time might be lost. However, it was surmised from the case study, that time spent in giving feedback is well spent and the improvement in work ethic in class, does lead to less time lost during teaching.

Thirdly, a student may obtain an excellent work ethic grade in the event the teacher may not have meticulously maintained the document. The Head of a school would therefore have to check the work ethic assessment documents from time to time to ensure that teachers maintain the required work ethic also.

Fourthly, a teacher may not give an assignment during the entire term and might mark 'Not – Applicable' on a certain criterion. This would affect work ethic assessment scores. Again it implied greater teacher accountability and some degree of supervision on part of management.

Explaining the need for Work Ethic Assessment to students

It is imperative that students understand that building a good work ethic was a life long investment. If students wanted to gain access to challenging tasks in their future professional careers; a good work ethic was necessary. An academic grade and work ethic grade rubric (refer Table 3) could demonstrate to students that irrespective of academic grades, they needed to move out of the low work ethic segments for reasons given below:

Students in the 'A' segment are high achievers and would be suitable for a variety of jobs. They would be encouraged by the fact that they would be valued by employers for certain jobs and this encouragement might actually lead to better academic performance.

Students in the 'B & C' segments are 'ideas' people. They would be perfect in development of new ideas but are unlikely to be placed where tasks required deadline adherence or high time bound execution. However, if they took feedback of work ethic assessment seriously and improved work ethic, they could move to the 'A' segment and would then be capable of handling a wide variety of challenging tasks. This would motivate students to shift from B & C segments to the 'A' segment.

Students in the 'C' segment are virtually eliminating themselves from the job segment. Such students would realize that there is a need to get themselves out of the bottom right segment.

Uses of Work Ethic Assessment:

a) The Learning Support Department can make use of the work ethic assessment, as a means of encouraging students, who do try hard at academics but currently this effort is not recorded.

b) The Sports department can make use of it as a part of their sports contract, for students who are good in sports and need to show that they are also maintaining their effort in academic subjects.

c) It can be used as a diagnostic tool. While work ethic at the corporate level means *delivering quality output on time*, in schools if the academic grade and work ethic grade are recorded separately, then differential-counseling strategies can be put in place to help students improve their overall performance. If the academic grade is high, but work ethic score is low, students need inputs on organizational and time management skills. If academic grades are low, and work ethic scores are high, students need input as to how to improve the *quality of their work* in order to improve their academic scores.

d) Feedback given to parents at parent-teacher meetings, can lead to right strategies of academic success and improvement in work ethic of students.

e) Since work ethic assessment was done for all subjects and will be recorded alongside the subject academic grade, it was possible to track work ethic of students across subjects as well as to use the assessment to record improvement in work ethic over time.

f) While teachers expect high level of work ethic from students, the latter in turn value teachers with high work ethic. Students respect teachers who mark and return work promptly, rarely miss class and are well prepared for class. While teachers assess work ethic for students, it should get them to reflect on their own professional characteristics.

g) It was imperative that teachers were trained in work ethic assessment before introduction of such assessment in schools.

h) The results from this study have been very encouraging. It was unanimously decided to introduce it as a part of formal assessment, from grades 9 to 12. It will now be recorded on the report card for each subject.

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Acknowledgements:

The contribution of Hema Ravichander, Strategic HR Advisor, Bangalore, India is acknowledged.

The contribution of Work Ethic Assessment Committee members at Mallya Aditi International School, Bangalore:

Chitra Punja, Geeta Paul, Preeti Sarin, Sneha Titus, Suravi Banerjee, Vandana Goswami is acknowledged.

TABLE 1

Component	Document	Measurable objectively
1. Punctuality	Register; - Recorded by subject teacher.	Yes
2. Regular assignment submission	Recorded on a form	Yes
3. Being prepared for class	Recorded on a form	Yes
a. Bringing books and equipment necessary for class.	Recorded on a form	Yes
b. Catching up on notes missed when absent.	Recorded on form	Yes
c. Completion of reading tasks	Questions asked by teacher and recorded on form.	Yes, but time consuming & difficult to complete if class size is large.
4. Positive attitude in class and active participation	Recorded on form	Some element of subjectivity.

Table 2 – Work Ethic Assessment form

1 Punctuality

Date	Details of late coming
	(Only a few rows displayed here)

2 Preparedness: Completion of home assignments on or before the due date

Due Date	Name of Assignment	Date / Time Submitted

3 Responsibility: Coming to class prepared with necessary books and stationery and other resources and having done the necessary readings. Catching up on work missed due to absences.

Date	Details

4 Attitude: Whether the student:

- Engages in the class through active participation in a group, listens to others' (peers/teachers) suggestions/ questions.
- Contributes to class activities.
- Responds positively to tasks given in class.

Record Anecdotal Evidence

For each of the above four categories, the marks to be given were as under :

Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never
3	2	1	0

Work Ethic Assessment Rating

Score	Rating
12	Excellent
10 & 11	Good
8 & 9	Satisfactory
6 & 7	Cause for Concern
Below 6	Unacceptable

WORK ETHIC RUBRIC

Academic grade	Work Ethics assessment score		
	High (A)	Medium (B&C)	Low (D)
High	Challenging jobs Give freedom to operate	Developmental jobs Idea cells	Individualistic tasks Not part of team assignment
	High execution tasks Minimal supervision	High execution tasks Must be supervised	Not suitable Not to be selected
Low			