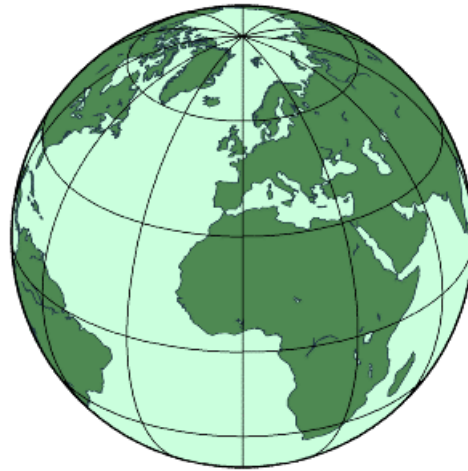


The Importance of Non-core Skills



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Introduction

- Many jobs have an obvious “core” skill
 - Example of such jobs: doctor, nurse, teacher, programmer, football player, musician, artist
- Many people think: “I can have a successful career if my core skill is better than most other people”
- Actually:
 - Having an excellent core skill may be necessary but it is *not* sufficient
 - You need to have “good enough” non-core skills too
- This chapter:
 - Explains why having poor non-core skills can hold back your career or activist goals
 - Suggests ways to improve your non-core skills

Example: Fred the programmer

- Fred is a skilled programmer & works at a software company
- Fred would love to spend all his working time doing programming. However:
 - He spends *less than half* of his time programming
 - Most of his time is spent doing other tasks.
Examples: project planning, high-level design, writing progress reports, team meetings, meetings with people in other departments (sales, marketing, documentation), mentoring new colleagues, email, ...
- If Fred has poor skills for those non-programming tasks then:
 - He has poor skills for the *majority* of his job
 - This lack of skills is likely to hold back his career

Example: Fred the programmer (cont')

- Fred has 3 choices (2 of which are bad ones)
- Choice 1:
 - “I will become even more skilled at programming; this will compensate for my poor non-core skills”
 - Result: Fred remains with poor skills for the majority of his job. This is not good for his career
- Choice 2:
 - “If I behave rudely then maybe I won’t be invited to meetings or asked to mentor new employees”
 - Result: Cultivating a bad personality is unlikely to help his career
- Choice 3:
 - “I will improve my non-core skills so they are ‘good enough’”
 - Result: Fred’s career improves

Example from a movie

- The movie *And The Band Played On* provides an example:
 - The movie is about scientists in the 1980s who investigated a new disease (AIDS) as it spread through America and Europe
 - The main character in the movie is Dr. Don Francis (played by Matthew Modine)
- Dr. Don Francis:
 - Has excellent medical research skills
 - But he has poor communication skills (he is sometimes tactless when communicating with others)
 - On several occasions, things he says annoy people and they react by making his work harder

How to improve your non-core skills

- You can improve non-core skills through formal education or training. However:
 - This can be expensive
 - Your work schedule might clash with the education timetable
- Another way is through self-study:
 - Read books on various topics, such as, management, leadership, project planning, sales, marketing, how to organize meetings, customer service, public speaking, writing skills, ...
 - Ask your manager or colleagues to recommend such books
 - Some “self-help” books provide useful advice, for example, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
 - Observe the techniques used by colleagues who have better non-core skills than you

Relevance of business skills for activists

- Some activists:

- Blame many of the world's problems on greedy businesses
- Like to reject anything associated with business

- But many business skills are relevant to activists.

Examples:

- Management and leadership skills, so you can organize people to work together to achieve a goal
- Marketing and sales skills, so you can communicate and “sell” your message to the general public in an effective way
- Time management skills, so you can be more productive in your activist work

- The book *The Lifelong Activist* by Hillary Rettig is useful. It:

- Explains the importance of these skills for activists
- Provides simple, introductory lessons for some useful skills

Summary

- Many people have an excellent core skill but poor non-core skills
- Poor non-core skills are likely to hold you back, both in a paying career and in activism
- It is important to find ways to improve your non-core skills
 - Self-study is probably a more affordable way than formal education