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# **The Study of the Soft skill level of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Workers in Westren Province, Sri Lanka**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to study the soft skill level of the ICT workforce in Sri Lanka and this is based on the Western Province area in the country. According to the survey of National IT-BPM Workforce Survey in 2019, ICT companies have become the dominant employer with a share of 65.5% of the workforce, overtaking non-ICT companies (22%) by a wide margin (ICTA, 2019). The top skills demanded by employers and top skills offered by training organizations are not aligned in a consistent order of priority in Sri Lanka. Moreover, there are also mismatches in supply and demand of skills and this happens in both directions. In one hand, there are some skills in demand from employers that are not supplied by training organizations (ICTA, 2019). The study also shows that there is considerable knowledge gap in ICT workforce in Sri Lanka to conduct further researchers on acquire and maintain productive employees to the industry.

Key words: Information Communication Technology (ICT), Soft skill

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## **1. Introduction**

Information Communication Technology (ICT) workforce is currently in a significant growth stage in Sri Lanka (ICTA, 2019; De Silva, 2015). ICT companies comprised of business entities that offer hardware, software, networking solutions and consulting services. According to the National ICT Workforce Survey, 2019, there are mainly five (05) entities can be identified in Sri Lanka.

As a result of globalization currently, Information Communication Technology has become a valuable partner in the most sectors in the country. As a result the ICT workforce is gradually increasing as a whole and also in the sub sectors.

Today with the higher demand arise from the customers/clients, every organization trying to provide an effective service to maximize their profit and the quality of the service they provide.

In most organizations use IT facilities to cater this demand and the ICT in Sri Lanka plays a major role. In both suppliers as well as users of ICT products provide job opportunities for ICT workforce in Sri Lanka.

All these factors indicate the demand in ICT sector job opportunities building up gradually with the time and now most organizations looking for to recruit skilled professional IT people from the job market.

ICT job skills mainly can be divided as core skills, soft skills and technical skills. Today, all these types of skills demanded by the employers and training institutes offered in their training courses.

In current ICT sector the employers has identified several issues in business process like, employees really good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, having lots of staff turnover and have to keep retraining people (Wickramasinghe, 2010). When the organizations have lots of managers but no real leaders, it's also an issue for the operation

Core skills relevant to the field and the technical skills help employees to get qualified for the job. The soft skills are needed to perform in the job. These skills are transferable and can be used in many different types of jobs.

ICT companies (ICT suppliers) providing variety of hardware, software and networking solutions and other supportive services to the customers, the soft skills are very much important for all the levels of employees In most ICT companies has identified that employees got the core and technical skills to complete the tasks given but lack of soft skills has effected in many areas of the business process.

It has been observed that ICT sector employees need several soft skills to perform in their jobs. The objective of the study is Identify the existing/lacking soft skills level of each employee based on Western Province, Sri Lanka.

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## **2. Literature Review**

It has been observed that soft skill of has become a main factor which is effecting the level of performance of every employees. A KPMG report (2007) empathies the difficulty of finding candidates with the right skills is an international problem. That report examining financial services firms in the UK and India highlights the "soft skills gap" by noting that 62 percent of organizations in the UK and more than 58 percent of organizations in India struggle to recruit the right talent.

According to the past literature the following soft skills can be highlighted which every occupation need from the employees(Kandra et. al., 2011).

### 1. Communication Skills

Employees should be able to express themselves well, whether it's writing a coherent memo, persuading others with a presentation or just being able to calmly explain to a team member what they need. Also communicate appropriately and professionally using social media is another approach of communication skills.

### 2. Team work and collaboration

Employers want employees to be productive as a team member who can maintain accountability to the team. Work with multiple approaches, which mean sometimes being a leader, sometimes being a good follower, monitoring progress, and meeting deadlines to achieve organization goals.

### 3. Adaptability

To succeed in most organizations, employees need to have a passion for learning and the ability to continue to grow and stretch their skills to adapt to the changing needs of the organization.

### 4. Problem solving

Employees should be able to identify and analyze problems and take effective and appropriate action. Employers expect creative and innovative solutions for problems arising within the business process. Transfer knowledge from one situation to another and finally the result should be able to measurable.

### 5. Critical observation

It is not enough to be able to collect data and manipulate it; the data need for to complete a task should be analyze and interpret. Employers expect employees to interpret data in different ways to give a summery and highlight the key areas for attention and suggest possible nest steps.

### 6. Conflict resolution

This mean the ability to persuade, negotiate and resolve conflicts to move up. Employees need to have the skills to develop mutually beneficial relationships in the organization so they can influence and encourage people. Negotiate win- win solutions is needed to serve the best interests of the company and the individuals involved.

## 3. Methodology

In this study the primary data was gathered by using a structured questionnaire based on 300 employees offive (05) selected ICT companies in Western Province. The composition of the questionnaire is limited to sis (06) selected soft skills and the sample was selected mainly from five job categories based on past literature.

The job categories are as follows:

**Table 01- Job Categories and the Numbers of the Sample**

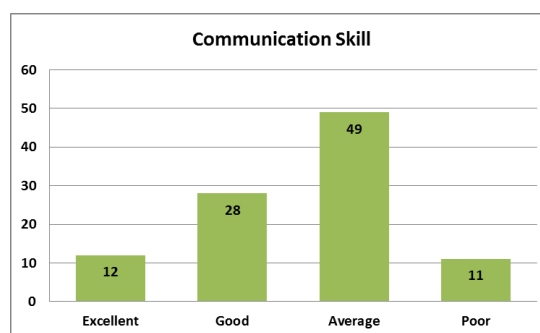
Job Category	Sample
Customer Support Engineers – Technical	30
Field Support Engineers– Technical	30
Help Desk Technicians	30
Software Design Engineers	100
Software Developing Engineers	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

To measure the responses on survey questionnaire for the analysis of primary data, used descriptive statistics, regression and correlation coefficient techniques mainly.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

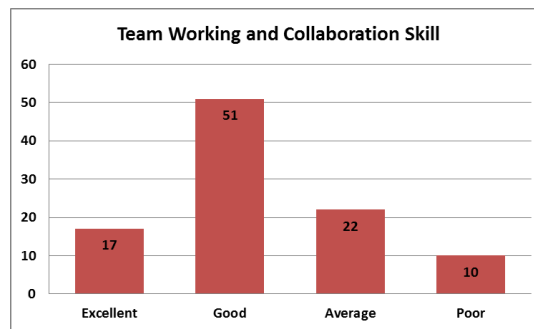
The outputs of the above said criteria are presented by charts using statistics through the process of primary analysis.

### Communication skill



**Figure 01 – Communication Skill Level**

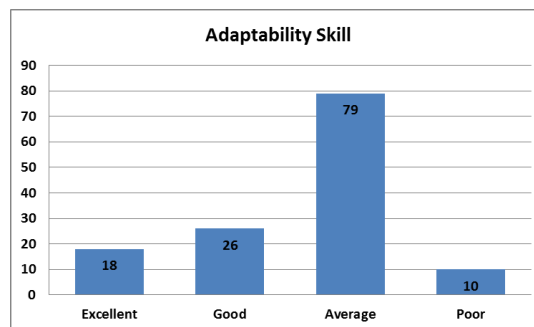
According to the Figure 01 the Communication Skill level shows its highest level as in "average" range and as a percentage that level shows as 49 out of the total level of the communication skill. The sum of the percentages of good and average levels of the communication skill is 40. The lowest level of the communication skill shows as 11% according to the Figure 01.



**Figure 02 – Team Working and Collaboration Skill**

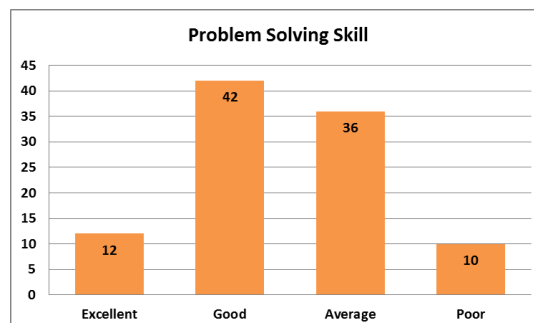
Team Working and Collaboration Skill is one of most significant skill of ICT employees (Müller &Antoni, 2020).This is due to IT sector employees need to work as a team most of the time when performing in their job to accomplish tasks given.

According to the Figure 02 the Team Working and Collaboration Skill level shows its highest level as in "good" range and as a percentage that level shows as 51 out of the total level of the skill level. The sum of the good and excellent levels shows as 68%. The "average" range comes to the next and that percentage is 22. The excellent level of the skill is 17% and conversely the lowest level percentage shows 10 according to the Figure 02.



**Figure 03 – Adaptability Skill**

According to the Figure 03 the Adaptability Skill level also shows its highest level as in "average" range and as a percentage that level shows as 79 out of the total level of the adaptability skill. The sum of the percentages of good and average levels of the adaptability skill is 44. The lowest level of the adaptability skill shows as 10% according to the Figure 03.



**Figure 04 – Problem Solving Skill**

According to the Figure 04 the Problem Solving Skill level shows its highest level as in "good" range and as a percentage that level shows as 42 out of the total level of the skill level. The sum of the good and excellent levels shows as 54%. The "average" range comes to the next and that percentage is 36. The excellent level of the skill is 17% and mean time the lowest level percentage shows 10 according to the Figure 04.

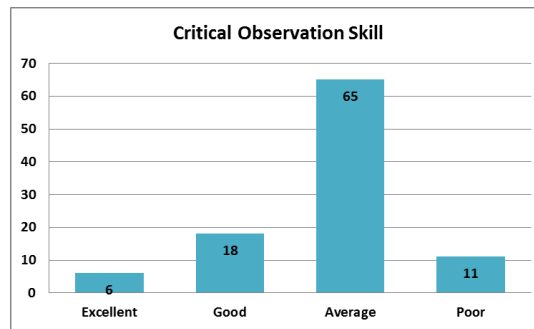


Figure 05 – Critical Observation Skill

According to the Figure 05 the Critical Observation Skill level shows its highest level as in "average" range and as a percentage that level shows as 65 out of the total percentage level of the Critical Observation skill. The sum of the percentages of good and average levels of the Critical Observation skill is 24. The lowest level of the Critical Observation skill shows as 11% according to the Figure 05.



Figure 06 – Conflict Resolution Skill

According to the Figure 06 the Conflict Resolution Skill level shows its highest level as in "average" range and as a percentage that level shows as 62 out of the total percentage level of the Conflict Resolution skill. The sum of the percentages of good and average levels of the Conflict Resolution skill is 20. The lowest level comes to the next highest level of the Conflict Resolution skill and that percentage shows as 18 according to the Figure 06.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The main objective of this research is to study the level of soft skill of ICT employees and the study based on the Western Province, Sri Lanka.

The conclusions on research findings that were generated through the research and set of tools applied.

Out of the total soft skills and apart from the Team work and collaboration skill and Problem solving skill other all criteria are shown prominently in average level throughout the population. The adaptability skill, Critical observation skill and Conflict resolution skill marked their "average levels" above the 50% of its individual total percentages. The above situation is impulse the ICT sector towards the development of their soft skills in these sectors. Conversely, the average level of Communication skill level is also shown as 49% out of its total population, it is also can be considered as a significant factor in this regard.

According to the above analysis, the prominent levels of Team working and collaboration skill and the Problem solving skill are in "good" level. This situation can be considered as a condition when studying the soft skill level of Sri Lankan ICT work force. The term working and collaboration skill affects to the higher level of performance of employees (Delarue et. al., 2008). According to the literature the Problem solving skill also navigates towards the higher performance of employees (Kling, 1995).

When considering the above overall analysis, out of six (06) soft skills levels of ICT workforce, four (04) criteria are in "average" level in a significant majority of the sample. Therefore it can be recommended to consider these circumstances and enhance the soft skill levels of ICT work force of Sri Lanka from "average" to "good" and "Excellent" levels. Enhancement of the soft skills is a most significant factor of smooth functioning and performance enhancement of a workforce (Nazron, 2017). By clarifying the level of soft skill of Sri Lankan ICT workforce, lastly this study clearly pin points the depth of paying consideration in this regard.

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