

**BENEFITS OF SOFT SKILLS FOR
MANAGERS OF DEAL OPERATION
CENTRE (DOC), HITACHI VANTARA (HV)
IN KUALA LUMPUR**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

Soft skills have become a subject of increasing interest in managers' development. Soft skills development is aimed to enable and enhance professional development, participation in learning, and engagement as well as success in career development. This study aims to assess and understand the benefits of soft skills for managers of Deal Operations Centre (DOC), Hitachi Vantara (HV) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There were four areas of interest examined in this study: awareness of soft skills, the benefit of soft skills, types of soft skills, and disadvantages of inadequate soft skills. The research was targeted into two groups: one (1) director and ten (10) managers. The population of the study consisted of 55% from the age group 45 and above and as for the gender, 73% of the respondents were male. All eleven (11) respondents acquired a minimum bachelor's degree and above as this was the entry qualification for a manager position. As for the length of service, 55% of the respondents have worked in their current position for at least ten (10) years. The approach used for this study was a qualitative methodology combining one (1) key informant interview and ten (10) semi-structured interviews. The result of the study highlights the significance of soft skills for managers in achieving continuous success for themselves and their teams. The five key soft skills identified - communication, leadership, teamwork, relationship building, and positive attitude - play a crucial role in effective management. The study's implications are significant. Managers who prioritize the development of soft skills can expect various benefits. Effective communication and teamwork lead to greater productivity through efficient collaboration within the team. Positive relationships built through relationship-building skills result in improved employee engagement. Strong leadership and organizational skills enable managers to manage workload effectively. Furthermore, possessing these soft skills makes managers more likely to deliver positive outcomes by motivating and inspiring their teams. The study also suggests that well-developed soft skills contribute to better self-confidence, enhancing overall leadership qualities and driving performance excellence. The findings of this study show that soft skills are imperative among managers to lead themselves and their teams in the direction of unceasing success. The five key soft skills identified through the study were communication, leadership, teamwork, relationship building, and positive attitude. This study also indicates that the benefits of soft skills are manifold. These benefits include greater productivity, improved employee engagement, better ability to manage workload, greater ability to deliver positive outcomes, better self-confidence, and leadership qualities that can drive performance excellence. Four recommendations were deduced from this study. The first suggestion is that managers should include soft skills in their learning, retraining, and upskilling. Additionally, it was recommended that soft skills are included in their performance management system's competencies, doing so will highlight how crucial they are in the workplace. Next, it was recommended that the managers need to align themselves with digital and technological advancement to keep themselves abreast with the ever-shifting skill sets. The final recommendation would be managers need to ensure they equip themselves with a new set of soft skills such as adaptability, embracing change, and working collaboration during this unprecedented turn of events such as the pandemic and other calamities.

Keywords: Soft skills, managers development, benefits, awareness, types, disadvantages, key informant interview, semi structured interview, findings, recommendations.

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

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[4 August 2023]

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the Doctor of Business Administration degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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Date: 4 August 2023

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

DOC	Deal Operation Centre
HV	Hitachi Vantara
HRDCorp	Human Resources Development Corporation
IR	Industrial Revolution
MHR	Ministry of Human Resources

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

The Malaysian business environment comprises multinational and local companies which operate in major cities across the country (InvestKL, 2019). In Malaysia, multinational companies from approximately 60 nations across the globe have invested in more than 3,000 business enterprises in Malaysia spanning various sectors such as manufacturing, information, and communications technology (ICT), medical, engineering, services and the financial industry, among others (InvestKL, 2019). These multinational companies are attracted to Malaysia by the conducive business environment and business-friendly policies practiced by the Malaysian government, which encourages foreign direct investment (Poorhosseinzadeh & Subramaniam, 2012). With the country's excellent infrastructure, multinational companies in Malaysia are thriving, providing employment opportunities to millions of Malaysians (InvestKL, 2019).

As part of their business operations, multinational companies in Malaysia provide Malaysian employees with learning and development opportunities, comprising both soft skills and technical knowledge. This contributes towards the expansion of Malaysia's knowledge economy and is a key driver in building Malaysia's talent pool.

With the establishment of the Human Resource Development Corp (HRDCorp), Malaysia encourages employers, both local and multinational companies, to invest in developing the skills of their workers or employees (HRDF, 2019). HRDCorp is a pool

fund under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, collecting levies from employers for the purpose of training and development of employees.

HRDCorp reimburses employers the training and development costs and expenditure invested into their employees (HRDF, 2019). This has created a thriving learning and development environment in various sectors in Malaysia's economy. The training and development covered by the HRDCorp spans both soft skills and technical training (HRDF, 2019).

This study analyses the benefits of soft skills for managers of Deal Operations Centre (DOC), Hitachi Vantara (HV) operating in the Kuala Lumpur.

1.1 Background of the Study

The researcher has opted to pursue this study as the researcher has vast working experience of over 20 odd years of knowledge and skills in this area. Over the years, the researcher had engaged with various government linked companies, multinational companies, and small medium enterprises. The researcher has first-hand knowledge of involving and imparting a variety of soft skills. As a result, the researcher has been even more interested in this subject because he is fervently certain that this study would be helpful to a variety of related businesses.

In consideration of the study of soft skills it is important to define soft skills, which can be described as personal characteristics or abilities that is able to empower individuals to interact effectively and efficiently with others (Binsaeed et al., 2017; Seetha, 2014).

These characteristics or qualities sum up an individual's values and approach in many aspects that also include attitude, habits and personality traits which are derived from education, occupation, and personal life experiences (Binsaeed et al., 2017). Soft skills encompass personality traits, positive character traits, interpersonal

communications, and social charms, complemented by performance on the job (Jena & Satpathy, 2017; Seetha, 2014).

According to Jena and Satpathy (2017), soft skills are key factors in differentiating between an ideal candidate and a less than favorable candidate. Where competition in the job market is concerned, hiring managers usually make soft skills the deciding factor in choosing between equally skilled candidates (Seetha, 2014). This is because these skills enable people to work and perform effectively in a certain environment (Suhaiza Ismail, 2013).

For decades long, individuals with hard skills, occupational or professional experience, and knowledge were valued more than those without these attributes. However, as organizations matured, it has been discovered that soft skills among employees, especially the organization's leadership, was crucial to organizational performance and success (Jena & Satpathy, 2017).

According to Suhaiza Ismail (2013), although technical skills and academic knowledge are important in a certain managerial role, management and supervisory roles call for candidates to have key soft skills such as communication skills, teamwork, and leadership skills. Suhaiza Ismail (2013) cited Balaji and Somashekar (2009) who posited that when an organization is downsizing its employees, those with additional soft skills are usually the ones to be retained. Suhaiza Ismail (2013) also cited Rumble (1998) who explained that managers with soft skills and competencies are able to provide high quality output and services to the organizations' customers.

As the Malaysian landscape increasingly embraces the digital economy, in line with global trends, skilled employees are increasingly on demand. However, although technical skills are mission critical, there is also a pressing need for soft skills among Malaysians. A survey conducted by global professional networking platform,

LinkedIn, reveals that the job market values talents that possess soft skills as much as hard skills (Rozana Sani, 2019). Job seekers and employees with soft skill competencies such as teamwork, leadership and effective communication skills are in demand by employees across various industries (Rozana Sani, 2019).

Rozana Sani (2019) states that as the competition for talents intensifies, organizations are increasingly seeking to build an adaptable workforce with both hard and soft skills. Rozana Sani (2019) reiterates that talents or job seekers with good relationship-building and communications skills will continue to be in high demand across various industries. Even technical roles in current times require soft skills such as leadership and teamwork (Rozana Sani, 2019).

A statement by Jobstreet.com in Malaysia, a top employment portal in the country, stated communications skills are among the top five soft skills by employers and that this soft skill helps to improve the employability of candidates (Rozana Sani, 2019).

According to Santhiram (2019), attitude is a prime motivator for an individual to take any form of action. The author states that when a talent has the right attitude, he or she is able to control emotions and impulses better and allow himself or herself to adapt to changing circumstances, which is a key driver in effective management skills. In addition to that, a positive attitude or rather the attitude itself is a necessary skill for sustained personal growth. Santhiram (2019) stresses that a positive attitude offers one self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, which are the foundation of emotional intelligence. Santhiram (2019) notes that a positive attitude demonstrates high levels of energy and abundance, which also positive effects those around a highly positive individual. The recognize their strengths and leverage on these whiles continuously improving themselves in various

areas where necessary. These attributes in turn lead to performance excellence Santhiram (2019).

Several soft skills that were pointed out by Malaysian employers, that they found lacking among Malaysian job seekers, include creativity, communications, and critical thinking (Hazlina Aziz, 2018). However, despite this realization, in a study conducted by Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) employers in Malaysia do not place importance on soft skills development among their employees, creating a vacuum in this area, unlike other developed countries where soft skills development is a core developmental track for employees. The survey stated that this has caused a mismatch in skills (“No thanks for all the education,” 2018).

The QS Global Skills Gap in the 21st Century report suggests that there are “sizeable and consistent disparities” between the expectations of employers and the skills. However, MNCs place great importance on soft skills, which Malaysian job seekers need to have to qualify for jobs at MNCs. The soft skills identified in this study which are Communications, Leadership, Teamwork, Relationship-building, Positive Attitude, Adaptability, Critical Thinking, Time Management, Interpersonal Skills, and Empathy.

As such it is important for Malaysian employees to be upskilled in soft skills and equipped with the necessary knowledge to develop their soft skills which will increase their marketability in the Malaysian job market. At the same time, ideally, it is important for organizations in Malaysia to realize the importance of soft skills especially among managers and the benefits that it can offer. When this is realized and acknowledged, Malaysians would be able to establish a more robust work environment with well-matched talents. This study provides a basis for organizations to understand and increase awareness on the importance and benefits of soft skills.

Soft skills among employees, especially managerial levels in an organization, provide tremendous benefits. Soft skills contribute towards a better work environment and work culture (Jena & Satpathy, 2017; Manullang, 2017; Seetha, 2014). In fact, good communications skills among managers, provide subordinates with clarity in common goals and organizational direction, while contributing good relationships among the team (Jena & Satpathy, 2017; Manullang, 2017; Seetha, 2014). Throughout the past few decades, emphasis has been placed on the need of skill sets that deal with people in general as well as task-related issues. It is important to recognize that the organization's success no longer depends exclusively on facts and stats. The individuals who work for the organization frequently have an impact on the value of the company in the market, including elements like company image. Organizations are actively looking for people with competitive soft skills in the workplace that could support both in-role and out-of-role performance in order to thrive in the VUCA world of today (A,2022). Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, or VUCA, are its initials. It defines the scenario of ongoing, unpredictable change that is currently typical in some corporate sectors and industries. You must steer clear of conventional, out-of-date methods of management, leadership, and everyday work in the face of VUCA (Stiehm, 2002).

In Seetha's survey on the workplace in Malaysia, 83% of the employers believed that soft skills are essential for success and prospects for promotion, while 14% were unconvinced and 3% thought there was no connection. It appears that the value of soft skills in the job continues after one is hired rather than diminishing at that point. Additionally, this suggests that having enough soft skills is never sufficient. Your career is secured, if not enhanced, through continual growth and learning (Seetha, 2014).

Well-developed and good leadership skills contribute towards better employee engagement and team spirit with leaders creating an engaging work environment (Jena & Satpathy, 2017; Manullang, 2017; Seetha, 2014). The ability to drive teamwork within the team by a manager enables the team to deliver performance excellence and better-quality results (Rozana Sani, 2019). Managers who are good at contributing towards healthy relationship-building improves employee engagement levels (Rozana Sani, 2019). Meanwhile, managers could inspire and demonstrate positive attitudes within their teams are able to develop greater innovation, creativity, problem-solving skills and results oriented (Jena & Satpathy, 2017; Manullang, 2017; Santhiram, 2019; Seetha, 2014).

1.1.1 Deal Operations Centre, Hitachi Vantara

This study is based on Deal Operations Centre (DOC), Hitachi Vantara (HV), a wholly owned subsidiary of Hitachi, Ltd., which is based in Kuala Lumpur. The company is a Japanese-based organization which has business interests in guiding customers based on their current technology needs and helping them prepare themselves for their future needs as well as in solving their digital challenges. HV works with its customers to apply unmatched industrial and digital capabilities with their data and applications to benefit both business and society. More than 80% of Fortune 100 companies place their trust on HV to help them develop new revenue streams, unlock competitive advantages, lower costs, enhance customer experiences, and deliver social and environmental value. HV's headquarters is based in Santa Clara, California, US and offers information technology hardware, software, data analytics and consultation services. HV has 14 corporate offices based in APAC (Asia Pacific Region) including Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, India, China,

Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and New Zealand. Globally the company has a total of 10,000 employees and out of which approximately 2,500 employees is based in APAC, of which 200 are based in Kuala Lumpur. HV has a customer base of 6,000 and 4,000 partners worldwide. This comprises nearly half of fortune 100 companies. The study is specifically carried out for Deal Operations Centre (DOC) of Hitachi Vantara (HV).

1.2 Problem Statement

In the context of multinational organizations like DOC, HV, soft skills play a critical role in the effectiveness and success of managers. However, despite their significance, soft skills are currently only superficially practiced within HV. As a result, managers may not fully understand the importance of developing and honing these skills, leading to potential shortcomings in leadership, communication, and team dynamics.

In the year 2020, HV embarked on an Asia Pacific survey conducted by Hitachi Consulting pertaining to the skills gap among 130 managers which incorporated the managers of the DOC. In that particular survey, the soft skills that were highlighted as being critical to the organization's success and the manager's growth and development are communication, leadership, teamwork, relationship building, positive attitude, adaptability, critical thinking, teamwork, interpersonal communication, and empathy (Hitachi Consulting Report, 2021).

Based on the interviews conducted with 11 respondents at DOC, HV, it was revealed that soft skills are indeed being practiced to some extent within the organization. However, it became evident that these soft skills are not given enough emphasis, especially considering HV's identity as an information technology company, where technical skills tend to take precedence.

Through this study, the researcher aims to demonstrate the benefits and importance of soft skills for managers of DOC, HV company in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This study will provide structured and well-researched insights to raise awareness on the topic among business organizations. This study will contribute towards driving a greater focus on soft skills development among business organizations and provide justifications for the importance of soft skills.

1.3 Research Questions

The research objectives of this study were:

- i. Are soft skills imperative for an Information Technology company such as DOC, HV?
- ii. What are the key soft skills that are relevant for managers of DOC, HV?
- iii. What are the benefits of soft skills for managers of DOC, HV?
- iv. What are the drawbacks and negative consequences of inadequate soft skills in managers working at DOC, HV?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study were:

- i. To investigate key soft skills that are relevant for managers in an organization through literature review.
- ii. To explore the most important soft skills among managers of DOC, HV.
- iii. To list the benefits of soft skills for managers of DOC, HV through interview exercises.
- iv. To determine the drawbacks and negative consequences of inadequate soft skills in managers working at DOC, HV.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study includes the demand of soft skills and their benefits to managers of DOC, HV. The scope of this study will also encompass the study of key soft skills that are required and the impact of lack of soft skills by the managers. The scope of this study will also span how the benefits of soft skills will impact the organization. This study comprises both primary and secondary data, whereby primary data is collected through key informant interview conducted and a semi structured interview with the managers of DOC, HV, while secondary data will be derived from a review of various literature. The scope of this study encompasses a qualitative approach which will provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the topic and be able to justify the topic in a more comprehensive and objective manner.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Soft skills are a key priority for employability in the job market, especially multinational companies. The results of this research study can benefit management practitioners in industries and help them understand the roles they should play. In Malaysia, there are numerous MNCs operating in the Malaysian economy and contributing towards the country's GDP. MNCs in Malaysia contribute to the employment of Malaysians with various skills sets and from diverse backgrounds (Iii, et al., 2006). According to InvestKL Corporation, Malaysia has attracted 91 global MNCs with approved and committed investments of RM13.95 billion since 2011, creating 12,584 jobs over the last 11 years (NST Business, 2020). According to a report by 3E Accounting, multinational corporations from 40 countries across the world are currently invested in more than 5,000 companies in Malaysia ("MNCs in Malaysia | Set Up Business in Malaysia," n.d.).

The findings of this research study will provide supporting knowledge and thought leadership on soft skills among managers, especially when planning for learning and development. The importance of soft skills is often undervalued and there is far less training provided for managers. Organization seems to expect managers know how to behave on the job such as taking initiative, communicating effectively, and listening which often is not the case. Most interactions with peers require some level of soft skills. According to a report compiled by a leading talent acquisition provider, 94% of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership position than an employee with more years of experience but weaker soft skills (iCIMS, 2017).

To raise workplace efficiency, promote teamwork and collaboration, increase staff retention, boost confidence and self-esteem, increase sales, and lower risks are just a few of the general advantages managers need to strengthen their soft skills (Pappas, 2019).

The lack of soft skills among managers could cause productivity, innovation, and growth problems. Many employers focus on the development of technical knowledge while neglecting the importance of soft skills. Strong soft skills are especially crucial for those in leadership to possess, as it will allow them to better understand, motivate, and direct the people beneath them. Without effective and harmonious personal interaction in the workplace, it can impact business operations.

The significant area of this research will bring the organization to apply it for the business as well as marketing direction, strategy, and vision to reach a cost-effective operation and; profitable organization. In essence, businesses in the sector have a right to demand the following qualities of potential employees: knowledge of the subject matter, a positive attitude, outstanding communication skills, and a willingness to learn

(Education, 2012). Regardless of the size of the organization, the majority of past research have found that employers appreciate soft skills more than hard abilities (Lowden et al., 2011).

The contribution of this study is incredibly significant for the management of DOC, HV to evaluate the current soft skills that are required and lacking among managers. There has been a growing demand for managers in MNCs in Kuala Lumpur to acquire soft skills in addition to technical skills. According to a survey conducted by LinkedIn in 2019, the labour market in Malaysia values talents with soft skills as well as hard skills, which makes soft skills an integral component in employability especially among managers (Rozana Sani, 2019).

The study would be a significant endeavor in improving knowledge and further practical application gained from the study will be valuable to any business with a similar setting as well the top management. This study offers valuable insights to other multinational companies of information technology sector employers through its structured and extensively researched data and findings on the benefits of soft skills among managers. The study is focused on researching and determining the benefits that soft skills present for managerial level employees taking into consideration various concepts and models posited by academicians and researchers. This research will provide supporting knowledge and thought leadership on soft skills among managers, especially when planning for learning and development. The future workplace will rely on soft skills where automation and artificial intelligence will result in a greater proportion of jobs relying on soft skills. Advances in technology have caused tasks that require hard skills to decline, making soft skills a key differentiator in the workplace.