

**SOFT-SKILL ASSESSMENT TOOL DEVELOPMENT TO
IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR CAREER
ADVANCEMENT IN GROUND PASSENGER SERVICE**

The seal of Mahidol University is a circular emblem. It features a central blue field with a golden Thai-style stupa or chedi. The stupa is flanked by two golden lions in a walking pose. The entire central design is encircled by a golden border containing Thai script. The text at the top of the border reads 'มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล' (Mahavithayalai Mahidol) and the text at the bottom reads 'วิทยาลัยการจัดการ' (Chulalongkornrajavidyalaya Management College).

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ADVANCEMENT IN GROUND PASSENGER SERVICE**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate 1) the perceptions of airlines and educators towards the importance of soft skills for career advancement in ground passenger service; 2) which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for successful career advancement in ground passenger service in the perceptions of airlines and educators and 3) the discrepancies between the perceptions of the two main stakeholders. In addition, this study further investigate 4) the ranking of each essential soft skills of each airline group; 5) which also shows the discrepancies between the perceptions of each airline group based on their needs. This study eventually aimed to develop and 6) an assessment tool in form of the Personality Test to assess the possessed skills of the candidates for career advancement. Both qualitative and quantitative were used in this study. In-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were employed to collect data. Informants and respondents were 61 airlines and 56 university instructors respectively. Data were analysed using means, percentages and chi-square test for the first stage of the study, while Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) was used to determine the ranking of essential soft skills. Most airlines and instructors agreed that soft skills were essential for career advancement for ground passenger service jobs. Results also showed that there were discrepancies between the perceptions of top ten essential skills identified by airlines and educators. Specifically, chi-square results showed that there were significantly difference in perceptions of airlines and education in seven soft skills. They were 1) ability and willingness to learn, 2) adaptability, 3) assertiveness, 4) communication, 5) conflict/dispute resolution skills, 6) planning and organizing and 7) work under pressure and stress. In addition, both parties agreed that four soft skills were not necessary for advancement in ground passenger service career; namely, 1) adaptability, 2) assertiveness, 3) conflict/dispute resolution skills, and 4) planning and organizing. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant discrepancy in viewing three soft skills. Unlike educators, airlines viewed that ability and willingness to learn and communication were not required traits to be successful while work under pressure and stress was viewed as important. Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, it was shown that popularity ranking method yielded quite similar results the ranking results by AHP model. There were only 4 soft skills, which were perceived differently 1) working under pressure and stress, 2) teamwork, 3) decision making skills and 4) emotionally stable. Based on the results of the assessment, it was clearly shown that there was a mismatch between the possessed skills of the current entry-level airline managers and the required needs of the high-level airline managers. The entry-level airline managers still did not have the right skills and still needed to be trained in particular soft-skills, which would be needed for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service. Academic institutions could revise their curriculum according to this study's results to better equip their students with what was required by airlines and to enable their graduates to move up the career ladder faster. Human Resource Personnel of airline companies should formulate their human resource strategies by including soft-skills topics into each of their work processes e.g. employee selection process, employee development process and employee promotion process etc. Apart from hard and technical skills new applicants seeking jobs in Ground Passenger Service should be assessed against the required soft skills. Airline companies should take part in outlining curriculum with the educators. In addition, future training initiatives should include the development of soft skills as identified in this research.

KEY WORDS: soft skills / soft-skill assessment / career advancement / ground passenger service

150 pages

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“It is not the most intellectual
of the species that survives;

it is not the strongest that survives;

but the species that survives
is the one that is able best to adapt
and adjust to the changing environment
in which it finds itself.”

Leon C. Megginson

(based on Darwin’s Origin of Species)

This chapter will introduce (1) Background Information: an overview of the current aviation market trend in Thailand. (2) Introduction to Airline Business in Thailand: in this section, an overview of the history of Airline Business in Thailand and also the overview of the current Airline Business Operations will be presented. (3) Introduction to Ground Passenger Service: the overview including the scope of work of Ground Passenger Service will be provided. (4) Introduction to the needs/expectation of the business sector towards labour market: the needs and expectation of the airline industry will be identified. (5) Introduction to number of aviation schools and universities with undergraduate programs for Aviation Management and Aviation Business Management: in this section, an overview of various programs being offered in the market nowadays will be presented. (6) Introduction to current curriculum in those schools and universities: in this section, the current curriculum being offered in aviation schools and universities will be presented. (7) Problem Statement: the main critique, which was led to the problem statement of the study will be addressed in details. (8)

Objectives of Research Study: the purpose of the study is being defined. (9) Expected Benefits: Both practical and social benefits are addressed.

1.1 Background Information

Thailand was now in the “Thailand 4.0” economic model era. Two sets of five industrial sectors each known as “First S-Curve” and “New S-Curve” were introduced as a framework to achieve a leap growth of Thai economy (Office of Industrial Economics). The government took effort to attract investments in these ten targeted industries including the aviation and logistics industries. These initiatives were supported by the rapid growth in the past seven years of passengers and air traffic movements (flights) through six international airports operated by the Airport Authority of Thailand (AOT). Specifically, the number grew from 53,937,193 million passengers and 362,475 flights in 2009 to 119,023,998 million passengers and 776,922 flights in 2016 (Air Transport Statistic, Airports of Thailand Plc. website).

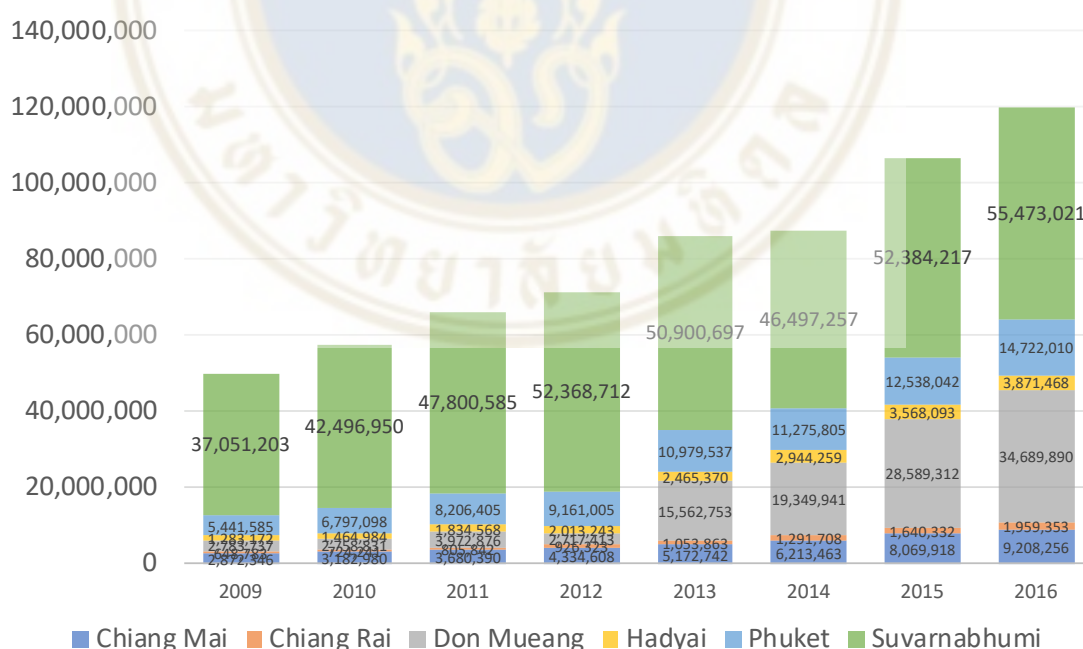


Figure 1.1 Display of the total passenger volume (persons) travelling through 6 international airports of Airport Authority of Thailand (AOT)
(Source: Air Transport Statistic, Airports of Thailand Plc Website)

As a result, many international airlines had already planned to expand their route network by flying to Thailand. The demand of the skilled labour in the industry would unquestionably increase.

1.2 Introduction to Airline Business in Thailand

The history of airports in Thailand goes back to 1914 when Don Mueang International Airport, the first airport in Thailand at that time, being run by Royal Thai Air Force, has started its operation. Though the airport has been in operation earlier, the first commercial flight coming into Thailand was KLM Royal Dutch Airline in 1924 with the routing Amsterdam-Bangkok-Jakarta. (Manon, 2014)

Since then, Don Mueang International Airport has grown with increasing numbers of airlines coming into Thailand and has fast become one of the major transport hubs in Asia. The main reason is the advantage of our strategic location within the region because Thailand is situated in the heart of Indochina and also South East Asia region. Hence, Don Mueang International Airport is considered to be the main gateway of the region. The government had seen the importance of airport expansion and launched the project of Suvarnabhumi Airport, which started their operation since 2006.

In 2018, Thailand has 11 International Airports, 22 airports with scheduled commercial service and another 27 other airports across the country. Six International airports are managed by Airports of Thailand PLC. (AOT), while any other airports are run by Department of Airports (DOA), Thai Military or an individual airline.

Thailand has become one of the most attractive destinations for tourists to visit. BANGKOK, the capital city of Thailand has become the most visited city in the world already 2 years in a row. In the year 2017, it is expected that Bangkok will have 20.2 million visitors, surpassing famous cities like London and Paris (Mastercard Destinations Cities Index September 26, 2017).

Bangkok Continues to Lead Among Top Destination Cities

Destination City	Country	2016 Overnight International Visitors (Millions)						2016 Visitor Spend (US\$ bn)
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (forecast)	
Bangkok	Thailand	15.82	17.47	17.03	19.59	19.41	4.0%	\$14.1
London	United Kingdom	15.46	16.81	17.40	18.58	19.06	5.0%	\$16.1
Paris	France	15.76	17.20	17.19	16.99	15.45	4.4%	\$12.0
Dubai	UAE	10.95	12.19	13.21	14.20	14.87	7.7%	\$28.5
Singapore	Singapore	11.10	11.90	11.86	12.05	13.11	2.6%	\$15.7
New York	USA	10.92	11.38	12.02	12.30	12.70	-2.4%	\$17.0
Seoul	South Korea	8.36	8.60	10.14	9.34	12.39	0.4%	\$9.4
Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	9.63	9.89	11.69	11.14	11.28	7.2%	\$7.2
Tokyo	Japan	4.89	5.40	7.68	10.35	11.15	12.2%	\$11.3
Istanbul	Turkey	8.82	9.87	11.27	11.91	9.16	0.9%	\$5.8
Hong Kong	Hong Kong (SAR) China	8.37	8.26	8.36	8.35	8.86	4.5%	\$6.1
Barcelona	Spain	6.91	7.18	7.42	7.69	8.36	6.5%	\$8.9
Amsterdam	Netherlands	6.10	6.65	7.35	7.70	8.36	4.3%	\$4.5
Milan	Italy	6.88	6.99	7.30	8.13	8.17	3.2%	\$4.9
Taipei	Chinese Taipei	4.70	5.83	6.38	6.85	7.35	5.5%	\$9.9
Rome	Italy	6.66	6.66	6.76	7.05	7.09	3.2%	\$4.5
Osaka	Japan	2.41	3.32	4.22	5.94	6.98	12.7%	\$4.0
Vienna	Austria	5.38	5.55	5.85	6.21	6.42	3.3%	\$4.4
Shanghai	China	6.04	5.71	5.89	6.06	6.38	3.2%	\$5.3
Prague	Czech Republic	4.92	5.05	5.32	5.71	6.11	4.5%	\$2.9

Historical data in each times series presented above has been updated with the latest figures or estimations and may not be comparable to the time series from previous editions of this report

Figure 1.2 Display of Mastercard Destinations Cities Index September 26, 2017

According to Airports of Thailand PLC (AOT), Thailand has welcomed a total of 129 million passengers last year through their 6 International airports in Thailand and they expect 10% passenger growth this fiscal year (2018) and continued growth for the next 4-5 years (Dr. Nitinai, Reuters Website, 2018). Many airlines are therefore increasing their traffic into Thailand. In order for the airports to be able to accommodate the incredible increasing number of the airlines and number of operating flights, there are currently several expansion plans of many of the airports.

Suvarnabhumi Airport, which inherited the airport code, BKK, from Don Mueang, is also known as Bangkok International Airport (BKK). The airport is one of the two international airports serving Bangkok, Thailand. Suvarnabhumi airport was officially opened for most domestic and all international commercial flights in 2006 and have handled 55,473,021 million passengers with 333,263 air traffic movement (flights) in 2016.

In Suvarnabhumi Airport, a total of 80 both International and Domestic airlines and 26 associated members have registered themselves with the Thailand Airline Operators Committee (AOC), which is an organization of airlines operating at Suvarnabhumi Airport and established on recommendations of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Our study and the research interview will be based from these airlines.

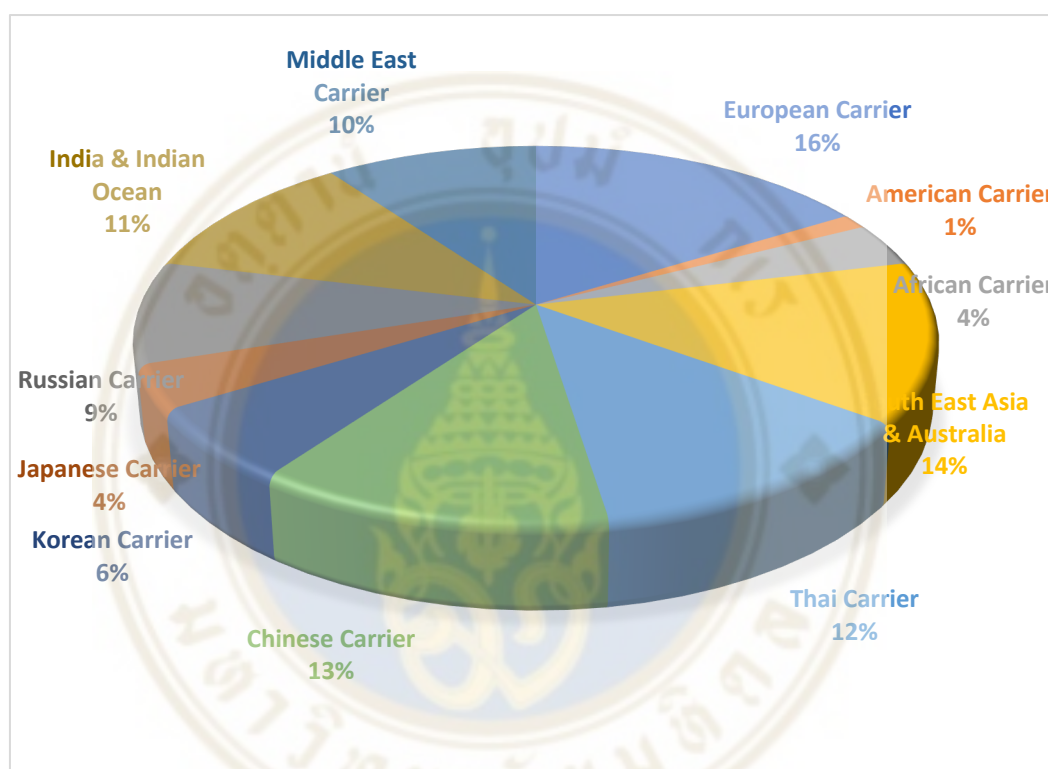


Figure 1.3 display of AOC Member List 2017

Source: AOC Member List 2017

1.3 Introduction to Ground Passenger Service

Based on anecdotal evidence, Ground Passenger Service is one of the main 5 different operational areas of aircraft ground handling including all the services, which an aircraft needs during the period it remains on the ground: cabin service, catering, ramp service, passenger service and field operation service.

Ground Passenger Service includes all services inside the airport terminal and off-airport terminal from the arrival until the departure of the flights and all issues

related to airline passengers e.g. providing check-in counter services, carrying out the departure services, performing of gate arrival services, staffing the counters in the transit area, customer service counters, airport ticketing desks, airline lounges and baggage service counters on arrival etc.

Ground Passenger Service is the unit that airlines need to focus on and highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce are needed in this section. As Ground Passenger Service Agents are the first impression to the passenger at the time the passenger arrives and departs. A wide variety of challenges characterize this job. Therefore, the responsibilities of this position demand highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

Due to the booming business of airline industry, the carriers have searched for methods to improve their competitiveness in the market. One of the common solutions for airlines is to outsource as many as services e.g. check-in activity, gate activity, ticketing activity, baggage tracing activity and ramp activity etc. to the Ground Service Providers. Hence, Ground Service Providers need to be able to tailor make their staff qualifications to airline's needs.

1.4 The needs of the business sector towards labor market

Due to the growth of the Aviation Market in Thailand, more and more airlines will operate with more flight frequencies and many new airlines will enter into Thailand Aviation Market bringing in high volumes of passengers throughout all airports across the country. Hence, the airlines and all stakeholders will definitely need a high number of qualified personnel to operate their flights and also to facilitate their customers.

Unlike other hospitality industries, providing service to airline customers was quite unique and challenging. Safety was the industry's number ONE priority, not the service. Hence, there were plenty of safety and security rules and regulations e.g. Safety Regulations, Security Regulations, National Security, Immigration Act, International Travel Law and International Customs Law etc., which all staff have to strictly adhere to. There is no compromise in topics related to safety and security to the airlines. How to ensure customer satisfaction while meeting all aviation safety and

security rules and regulation was challenging. Airline staff, therefore, needed specific sets of skills to successfully perform their jobs.

Thus, the staff working in this business especially the frontline staff dealing directly with the customers e.g. Ground Passenger Service agent will strongly need to pose various kinds of non-routine skills e.g. interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, communication skills and problem solving skills etc. as they strongly need to adhere to all the regulations and have to be able to provide the Service Excellence to the customers at the same time.

1.5 Aviation schools and universities with undergraduate programs related to Aviation Business

Based on written evidence, it has shown that the aviation training program was firstly introduced in Thailand in 1961 by the Civil Aviation Training Centre, Thailand (CATC), who was established as a cooperative project between the United Nations Special Fund (UNSF), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the Royal Thai Government. The primary objective of this project was to develop and upgrade civil aviation in the Southeast Asia region, bringing it up to the standards as stipulated by ICAO in accordance with the ICAO Annexes to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. While the first undergraduate programs for Aviation Management has been offered by Suan Dusit University with Bachelor degree of Arts Program in Airline Business.

Based on information from Office of Higher Education Commission, there are 23 universities across Thailand offering bachelor's programs both in Thai and in English in the field of Aviation Management e.g. Airline Business, Air Traffic Management Program, Airport Management Program, Air Cargo Management Program and Airline Business Management Program etc. and also various kinds of degrees being offered e.g. Bachelor of Business Administration in Airline Business Management, Bachelor of Technology in Aviation Program in Aviation Management and Bachelor of Arts in Aviation Management program etc.

1.6 Current Curriculum

From the airline's perspective and past experience, students in Thailand graduated in Hospitality Program: Airline and Tourism studies from those aforementioned universities are often very well educated in terms of hard skill. Unlike in the past, when newly employed airline employees were entering this field without any airline background or any airline knowledge, this new generation of employees, would normally already possess airline know how, subject knowledge in terms of technical skills such as aviation jargon, airline technical terms, passenger service handling procedure, departure control and reservation system, ticket issuance or even the knowledge of hospitality management. This results from the significant development in the curriculum enhancement from the university side in the past few years. The curriculum seems to provide comprehensive subject knowledge including many advanced technical skills that is required by the airline industry.

However, when it comes to soft skills like confidence, decision making, team player, communication, attitudes, interpersonal skills, emotional quotient (EQ) etc., it seems that these students are very much lack of these qualifications in their actual working life. They are unable to handle difficult situations and do not have the level of negotiation skills or sometimes are even unable to control themselves in terms of emotion or attitude.

When it comes to the career advancement, when airlines are offering the opportunities for promotion, seeking for the employees to take higher responsibilities, becoming a leader of a group, it has clearly shown that employees who are lack of those soft skills, are very unlikely to be considered in the selection.

According to airline operators' perspective and experience, their regular staff evaluation has clearly shown that their employed staff graduated in airline business studies shows great competence in the area of technical skills, subject knowledge and functional ability. The lesser competence of these staff are unfortunately their soft skills like the ability to work under pressure, their negotiation skills, the ability to working in a team etc.

1.7 Problem Statement and Rational of the Study

Many higher educational institutions in Thailand offered degrees in airline business management. The department within the industry that had the highest demand for new workforce was ground passenger service. Hence, most graduates landed jobs in this area of the industry. Airlines agreed that ground staff members having a qualification in airline business related majors possessed required technical skills, subject knowledge and functional ability. However, what they lacked was soft skills like the ability to work under pressure, their negotiation skills, the ability to work in a team, etc. This incompetence forbade them from getting successfully promoted to higher positions such as supervisors or flight managers.

The World Economic Forum (2014) mentioned that skills were a critical asset for individuals, business and societies and matching skills and jobs had become one of the high-priority policy concerns. Currently, the mismatch between the skills that an employer expected and the skills the educational institutions equipped their graduates with led to a significant loss in the human capital investment and the productivity of airlines. Airlines were forced to spend a significant time to ensure that their employees were able to work and had the right mindset of international standard.

Hence, a shared understanding and commitment between the two major stakeholders which were the educational institutions, the supplier of the workforce to the industry and the airline companies, the workforce users in the market, were necessary and very beneficial to the business. Past research tended to focus on hard and technical skills of airline staff members. None explored the discrepancy between the soft skills airline employers needed and those skills educational institutions equipped their students with. This study therefore aimed to shed some lights on this crucial issue.

1.8 Objectives of the Research Study

The objectives of this study are to investigate 1) the perceptions of airlines and educators towards the importance of soft skills for career advancement in ground passenger service; 2) which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for successful career advancement in ground passenger service in the perceptions of airlines and educators and 3) the discrepancies between the perceptions of the two main

stakeholders. This study would provide practical implications for all parties involved: graduates, academic institutions and airline companies. In addition, this study further investigate 4) the ranking of each essential soft skills of each airline group; 5) which also shows the discrepancies between the perceptions of each airline group based on their needs. This objective of this study eventually is to develop an assessment tool in form of the Personality Test to assess the possessed skills of the candidates for career advancement.

1.9 Expected Benefits

Based on the literature review, research on promotion decisions in any business has been described as the most under explored area of organizational effectiveness. (Chung and Leung, 2001). It was widely mentioned that very few studies have actually asked managers how they made promotion decisions or how criteria were used in their own promotion. (Clinton O. Longenecker, Laurence S. Fink, 2008).

Hence, the present study will be done in coordination with both real managerial level practitioners and educators to explore which soft skills are required most in career advancement and which soft skills the students should be equipped with prior to entering into the labour market. The findings will shade light on the criteria being used in making decisions on career promotion and their relative important factors with respect to each aspect of the career advancement in Ground Passenger Service field. In addition, the findings may as well provide the insight on the skills being needed for each type of airline to the educators.

This study will have practical implications at all individual, academic and organizational levels. The findings will be beneficial for an organization to clearly state criteria of soft skills on which it would be based while making promotion decisions and evaluating an employee's career prospects and also for the academic sector to benefit from a transparent and systematic examination of the criteria that are important and need for the career advancement from the real managerial level practitioners' perspective and also to effectively design and formulate the whole curricular in order to align with the market needs as well as to assess their students whether they are ready or whether they have potentials in career advancement in Aviation Business especially in the Ground

Passenger Service Handling. On top of this, the findings will be also very much beneficial for the individual to have better understanding of what managers consider when they make decisions regarding promotions within the organization and also what soft skills they should pose in order to be successful in Aviation industry.

Last but not least, the assessment tool, which will be designed based on research study, will provide a tool to assess the own personality strengths so as to develop appropriate career strategies to enhance success. It will provide the directions for individual to learn and modify their knowledge, skills and personality for career success.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the context of Soft Skills and the Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service, this chapter presented the background information of each factor as a foundation of this research. Through a careful and thorough literature review and previous survey instruments, this study has explored;

- (1) The various definition of Soft Skills
- (2) The essence of Soft Skills
 - (2.1) Soft Skills as key element of graduate's employability
 - (2.2) Employer's perception of Soft Skills needed in today's workplace
 - (2.3) Incorporating Soft Skills into the curriculum
- (3) The definition of Job Performance
- (4) The effect of Soft Skills on Job Performance
- (5) Career Success: The meaning of Career Advancement
- (6) Considerations in organizational career advancement
 - (6.1) Modelling the promotion process
 - (6.2) Criteria related to promotion
 - (6.3) The causal relationship between Job Performance and Career Advancement
- (7) Soft Skills needed for Career Advancement

2.1 The various definition of Soft Skills

Although the term “soft skills” had been widely mentioned and discussed in both business and education sectors for decades, people still could not differentiate or identify which of their skills were soft skills. People usually related the term “soft skills” to a capability in doing something. When people were asked about their skills, they usually referred to the practices that they could do well such as calculating complex

mathematics without using calculating devices, touch-typing, computer literacy, cooking, dancing and playing sports, etc. (Robles, 2012). When people used the term “skills”, they typically referred to the characteristics or definitions of hard skills. Actually, hard skills were those achievements which were included on their personal resume e.g. education, knowledge and work experience, etc. whereas the term “soft skills” was not about skills in the traditional sense (Investopedia, 2012). The Oxford English Dictionary defined soft skills as personal attributes, which enabled someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.

Hence, “soft skills” was an umbrella term covering various essential skills such as personality traits, communication skills, interpersonal skills, social skills, leadership skills, emotional intelligence (EQ), negotiation skills, ethic, teamwork and more that drive people to operate (Deepa & Manisha, 2013). In a workplace, staff being equipped with soft skills had the competitive advantage over others and staff who failed to practice on these skills would find it difficult to be promoted to a higher position as “soft skills” typically complimented hard skills to help people to accomplish their goals.

The term “soft skills” was used at the first time by the U.S. Army when they attempted to clarify the needed skills outside of technical knowledge or any other hard skills (Buckley, 2017). After several attempts in clarification, they finally defined the term “Soft Skills” as the skills which were important job-related skills but have no interaction with machines. Once the term was defined and released in 1972, “Soft Skills” began to be circulated in other industries and be widely mentioned until today.

Perreault (2004) defined soft skills that they were personal qualities, attributes, or the level of commitment of a person that set him or her apart from other individuals who might have similar skills and experience, while in the same year, James and James (2004) defined soft skills as aspects of attitude and emotion that were demonstrated through effective communication and interaction with customers and employee. Soft skills characterized certain career attributes that individuals might possess.

According to Hargis (2011), Soft Skills were classified as “work ethic, critical thinking, and problem solving” skills as part and parcel of soft skills, while Fogle (2011) defined soft skills included “teaming skills” in its preview in addition to communication and social skills. In addition to this, Hurrell, Scholarios, & Thompson

(2012) defined that Soft Skills were nontechnical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts, meanwhile Parente, John Stephan and Randy Brown (2012) defined soft skills as people management skills,

To conclude, soft skills were commonly defined as the cluster of personality traits, attitudes, behaviours and social graces that marked each one of us to varying degrees and also rather than technical aptitude or knowledge (Maniscalco, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2017). Soft Skills were the intangible, nontechnical and personality specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator and negotiator unlike hard skills, which were about a person's skill set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills were interpersonal and broadly applicable (Robles, 2012; Spectrum Networks Solutions Private Ltd. website)

2.2 The essence of Soft Skills

Through the careful and thorough literature review on “soft skills” related, the answer to why “soft skills” were considered as being so crucial especially in today's time is still open. There were plenty of good reasons for having a critical look at a person's soft skills. One of the valid reasons could be the current high competitive today's job market with harsh environment, where each candidate had to find his/her unique competitive advantage, which distinguished him/her from other candidates. While content knowledge, which generally referred to the facts, concepts, theories, frameworks and principles, was widely taught and learned in specific academic courses, soft skills were the qualification, which were usually overlooked as they were to visualize, to judge and to evaluate a person's soft skills but it was the most crucial assessment factor to select the candidates among all candidates with similar qualifications and comparable evaluation results. (Adnan et al., 2012)

Over the last few years we have seen a growing public awareness of the need to identify the intangible factors which played a very important role in graduate's employability and also in success at the workplace. In numerous researches and studies, many professional experts have reasonably described and concluded that these extra skills are precious. (Andrews & Higson, 2008)

The essential of “soft skills” have been emphasized time after time by various authors and organizations (Deepa and Manisha, 2013; Klaus, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Meenakshi, 2009; Glenn, 2008; Watts & Watts, 2008; Wilhelm, 2004). According to a research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Centre has reckoned that 85% of job success came from having well-developed soft skills respectively people skills, and only 15% of job success came from hard skills, which referred to technical knowledge and skills (Shukla and Kumar, 2017).

Meenakshi’s research in 2009 studying about 50 mid-level to top level executives in various cities in India found that all respondents agreed that soft skills were important for them to succeed in their career. Besides, his findings were supported by Deepa and Manisha’s work (2013), who conducted another research with 135 mid-level to top level executives in various cities in India. Their study showed that 86% of respondents agree that “soft skills” were indeed very crucial for career success.

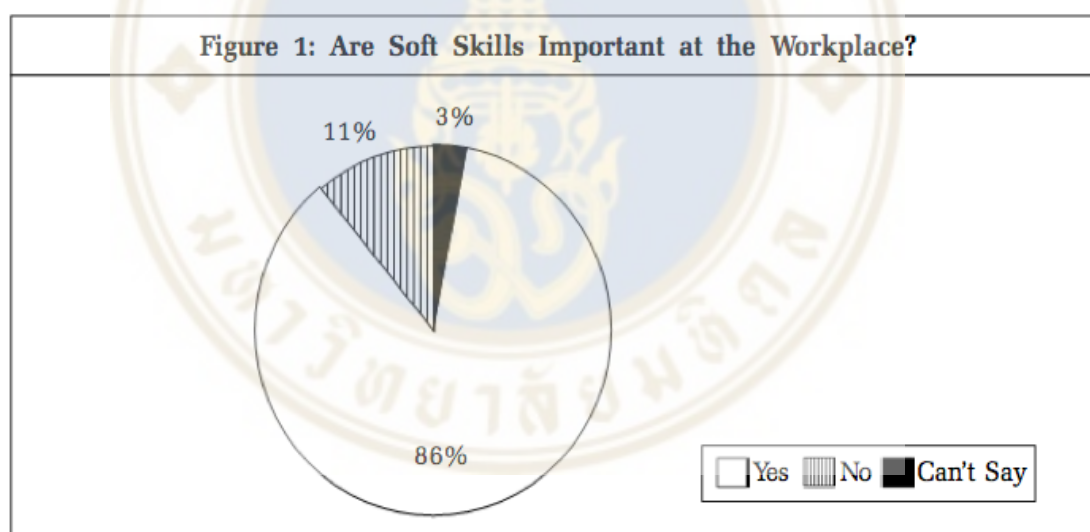


Figure 2.1 The findings were generally on expected lines, with 86% respondents agreeing that soft skills were indeed very important to succeed at the work place (Deepa, 2012)

Klaus (2010) reported that 75% of long-term job success depended on people skills while only 25% is decided by technical knowledge. Another study indicated 85% of career success was based on a person’s soft skills, and only another 15% was on a person’s hard skills (Watts & Watts, 2008, cited in John, 2009). As

employers increasingly looked for employees who were mature, people-oriented and socially well-adjusted, they usually rated soft skills as the most important factors for entry-level success on the job (Wilhelm, 2004).

Soft skills have been a subject of increasing interest in lifelong learning as they were strongly associated with life and employment success including being hired, promoted and succeed. (Gibb, 2014)

In the past, hard skills had always been the main focus of an organization, when it came to staff recruitment, staff selection and staff promotion. Trainings had always been focused on hard skills, knowledge, techniques but rarely on soft skills. However, it has become quite evident in the past few years that soft skills matter and was in fact the most crucial qualification of an employee to contribute to the success of a company. Soft skills were the qualification that contributed the hard skills of a person to become successful in a career. Person with great soft skills including being able to get along well with people, having good attitudes, always willing to help, was the one who could motivate people and built up a good team and finally led the company to the great success. (Klaus, 2010)

In this research, the term “Soft Skills” has been defined as the personal attributes, which cover various essential people skills such as communication skill, interpersonal skill, teamwork and leadership etc. In addition, these skills enable person to interact effectively with other people.

2.2.1 Soft Skills as Key Element of Graduate’s Employability

Based on customs, a graduate job has meant a job or career path for which a certain degree was required as the entry level qualification. However, it was mistakenly interpreted sometimes in some studies that “a graduate job” could be defined as “a job that a graduate does”. The term “a job that a graduate does” could not be defined as “a graduate job” because some graduates worked in places that did not require a degree, which was not what to be called a graduate job.

Graduate employers were diverse group of small to large employers from a wide range of industry sectors. These employers specifically set out the rule to recruit graduates with tertiary qualifications relevant to their industry. Though all graduated candidates would be doing similar tasks in graduate jobs, internship, student-led

volunteering activities, summer vacation programs, they were all still quite different from one to another and the graduate employers also had a criterion to distinguish them and select the right one. People usually widely questioned why the higher scoring candidate was not chosen.

During the past decades, it has been emphasized that soft skills played a crucial role in increasing the opportunities of the graduated candidates to get an employment. Technically, it helped the candidates improving their employability skills. Keller et al. (2011) claimed that employability skills were a classification of attributes and skills, in which attributes spoke to non-skill related behaviours and attitudes, while skills referred to the ability to carry out a technical task.

Through the extensive literature review, it has been found that integration of soft skills into the business curriculum promotes hiring of students in today's workforce (Glenn, 2008; James & James, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2010; Perreault, 2004; Wilhelm, 2004).

Defining "soft skills", Duncan and Dunifon (1998) stated that these were as good a predictor of labour market success as level of formal education and basic employability skills were a good predictor of success in the workforce.

In 2007, the career management consultant Challa Ram Phani published an article under the headline "The top 60 soft skills at work", listing and discussing 60 skills, which according to his study were the most essential personal traits and skills when it came to any type of job selection (Phani, 2007 cited in Schulz, 2008).

The exploration of the learning and skills in the 21st century has been initiated from the concerns about the transformed goals and daily practice of learning to meet the new demands of the current job market, which was characterized as knowledge and technologically driven. Today's workforce has experienced tremendous changes due to advances in Technology; consequently, the old way of doing might be effective but not efficient anymore (Redmann and Kotrlik, 2004 cited in Deepa and Manisha, 2013). To ensure success, graduated students entering into the 21st century job market must inevitably possess "soft skills" along with their technical competence (PCBEE, 2000 cited in Deepa and Manisha, 2013). Based on numerous researches (Ganzel, 2001; Sutton, 2002; Glenn, 2003; NBEA, 2004 cited in Deepa and Manisha, 2013; Wilhelm, 2004; Redmann and Kotrlik, 2004), it was repeatedly confirmed that the possession of

soft skills was the key to individual success for entering in the 21st century workforce and for personal career advancement.

2.2.2 Employer's Perception of Soft Skills needed in today's workplace

The significant changes in the workplace in the 21st century, which were the results of new and advanced technology, had forced graduating candidates and employees to be well equipped with soft skills (Ganzel, 2001). Previously, technical skills known as hard skills were the only skills needed for graduate's employability but for today's workplace being equipped with only hard skills was no longer sufficient to keep individuals employable when organizations had been imposed with such policies as right-sizing, down-sizing, re-engineering and positions cutting (James & James, 2004). Nealy (2005) endorsed the other several researchers (Klaus, 2010; Maes, Weldy & Icenogel 1997; Mitchell et al., 2010; Wellington 2005) that soft skills were essential for productive working performance in today's workplace. Business leaders had to emphasize the development of such soft skills.

Intensive studies on essential skills needed for career success among Fortune 500 CEOs were conducted by the Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation. The results showed that 75% of long-term job success and career advancement depended on soft skills and mainly on people skills and only 25% was on hard skills (Deepa & Manisha, 2013).

For effective performance in the current workplace, companies were looking for the graduated candidates and employees, who did not only have the hard skills, which referred to the domain knowledge, technical and analytical skills, but also soft skills, which included the ability to deal with the external world of customers, suppliers, vendors, the government and public, and also to work in a collaborative manner with their colleagues.

In the book, *Lesson from the Top* by Neff and Citrin, the duo talk about 10 top success tips, out of which eight were concerned with soft skills and only two criteria talked about hard skills (Deepa & Manisha, 2013). In addition, based on several studies ("Employers Value Communication," 2004 cited in Deepa & Manisha, 2013; Glenn, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2010; Perreault, 2004; Sutton, 2002; Wilhelm, 2004) in various

business sectors, it was underpinned that employers deemed to hire candidates with strong interpersonal skills. The 21st Century Employers have stressed that the educators from academic sector should be teaching their students how to cooperate and collaborate with others in the workplace and successfully acquire the customer service skills (Evenson, 1999). Soft skills were essential that they had been usually ranked as number one and extremely important for potential job employability in many occupations and industries (Sutton, 2002).

Other surveys and studies also revealed that today's employers were often more concerned about soft skills or attitudes rather than technical knowledge or competencies. Based on several empirical studies of work, it was found that employers and workers also felt that generic skills e.g. problem solving skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, ethic and teamwork were more essential for workplace success.

The necessity of possessing “soft skills” has been revisited in 2012 by Robles. Based on his research study among around 57 executives in USA, it was found that though the employers exceedingly deemed to hire new employees, who were equipped with strong soft skills e.g. integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork and work ethic, the hard skill was also needed as the hard and soft skills must complement one another.

2.2.3 Incorporating Soft Skills into the Curriculum

The U.S. Department of Labour indicated that though the industry valued interpersonal skills the most in new employees, the freshly graduating candidates were not taught the soft skills they deemed for (Mangan, 2007). This fact was highlighted again in the study of Deepa S and Manisha S (2013) showing that 60% of the 100 respondents, who were mid-level to top level executives from about 4-5 business sectors in India, said that the quality of new employees was lower than expected. Those respondents claimed that these students did not possess the necessary soft skills to succeed in the workplace. In addition, 82% of the respondents mentioned that there were gaps between the industry requirements and the outcome of the academic sector. In conclusion, the respondents believed that adding soft skills in university curricula

would help improving the quality of the new workforce to the business. However, the educator needed to know what soft skills were essential.

The study by Rosenberg, Heimler and Morote in 2012 revealed that an understanding of the attitudes in relation to these various skills was very much crucial because educators and practitioners in the industry seemed to work separately. Employers never clearly communicated their needs and expectations for the college graduates that they sought to hire. Even when one existed, Richens (1999), the structure of education made it tough and complicated to implement changes. The misperception of job requirements by the employers was confirmed by Rosenbaum and Person (2003). Plastrik et al. in 2003 reported that if no steps were taken to improve graduate's competencies after graduation, the gaps between the skills expected by the airline industry and those acquired by graduates during their studies would never be closed and might even become wider and wider.

In order to meet the needs of the industry or to bridge the current gap, the educators must continually investigate and identify the essential competencies including both hard skills and soft skills being demanded by the industry and revised the curriculum to meet these needs. On another hand, the industry also had to clearly communicate downstream to the educators the sorts of skills and the required competency level being deemed for the industry.

One of the major challenges of soft skills training being encountered by the educators was that soft skills were intangible, nontechnical and personality-specific skills. Hence, it was tough to figure out on how to teach or assess the level of individual soft skills or how to identify the impact of such programs on learners (Holtom & Bowen, 2007; Zehr, 1998). Consequently, the outcome of soft skills training was often intangible and could not be quantified.

Soft Skills could be included into the curriculum by proportionally and careful promulgating the topics and contents throughout all semesters (Evenson, 1999). Providing training courses, focusing on customer service skills and also incorporating the basic people skills into these courses would help students to understand and get along better with people, while facilitating a problem-solving discussion based on real-life situations and having students demonstrating the soft skills, which they had learned

by using role-play exercise in order to see whether students could really apply the study into their real life

In 2004, Yim-Teo revealed that educational institutions worldwide, including Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and USA were placing greater emphasis on enhancing graduate employability by strengthening their soft skills and adopting a more employability-oriented approach to the curriculum. According to CBI's report (Confederation of British Industry's) in year 2009, in a 2008 survey, almost all UK universities agreed that it was important for all graduates to possess employability skills.

On top of this, this study would be helpful for the educators because the findings of this study would report the most critical workforce soft skills demanded in the workplace. This would help the educators to draft the curriculum in such a way so as to increase the employability and the success in the career of their students.

Studies of competencies needed have adopted multiple models to define and categorize specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes or attributes (KSAs) essential for success. A carefully extensive review of the literature, summarized in Table 1, found that though numerous hard and soft competencies have been identified as important, soft competencies were considered to be more essential.

Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Brownell (1994)*		General Manager of the 20 largest lodging companies in USA	To identify the communication skills and job-related activities that most significantly contributed to an individual's advancement	Listening competency is the most important communication skill for career advancement.

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Okeiyi et al. (1994)*		HR directors and industry practitioners of 40 food operations in USA & 200 educators and students in hospitality management program	To determine the perceived importance of food and beverage competencies and compare the perceptions of practitioners, educators, and students	Human relations and managerial skills were rated most important by all groups.
Tas et al. (1996)*		277 General Manager of the hotels in USA	To rank the most important competencies for entry-level manager in hotel business	Interpersonal, leadership, and conceptual-creative domains were rated highest.
Chung (2000)*		800 graduates of hotel management programs working in Korea	To reform the hotel management curriculum at Korean universities	The domain competencies of management of employee and job and management analysis techniques were most important for career success.

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Lin (2002)*		200 general and assistant general managers at international hotels in Taiwan	To examine the relationship between important competencies for career success	Communication skills and adaptation to environmental changes are the most important competency dimensions for career success
Chung-Herrara et al. (2003)*		735 senior-level industry executives at hotel companies	To devise a future-oriented leadership-competency model for senior-level managers in the lodging industry	Self-management, which included personal characteristics, ethics, integrity, time management, flexibility and adaptability and self-development, was rated the highest.
Gursoy & Swanger (2004)* PART 1		2,339 industry professionals	To examine the perceptions of hospitality professional of the subjects that are important for undergraduates to be successful	Ethics and leadership were ranked as the two most important subject areas

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Gursoy & Swanger (2005)* PART 2		2,339 industry professionals	To develop course content items for each course included in the curriculum model	Developing well-rounded managers with leadership skills, communication skills and good ethics are the most important task of academic sector.
Raybound & Wilkins (2006)*		850 general managers, HR managers & operations managers in hospitality properties and 211 graduate students in Hotel Mgt program	To investigate hospitality managers' expectations of graduates' skills	Skills associated with problem solving, interpersonal, and self-management skill domains were rated as most important.
Tesone & Ricci (2005, 2006)*		Members in Hotel & Lodging Association	To determine practitioner perceptions of desired competencies of entry-level worker	Interpersonal interactive abilities were preferred over productivity and concrete work skills.

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Andrews & Higson (2008)	Semi-structured interview	50 people across all four countries (UK, Austria, Slovenia and Romania); 30 business graduates and 20 employers	To analyse the graduate and employer perspectives of graduate employability	Three significant themes are business specific issues (business qualification can enhance employability), interpersonal competencies (written and oral communication skills) and work experience.
Ranjit & Wahab (2008)	Survey	Human Resource Managers and 102 hiring managers from 100 companies in Malaysia	To identify top ten soft skills sought by Malaysian employers	Top 10 soft skills are integrity, willingness to learn, communication skills, initiative, achievement orientation, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, flexibility, high self-esteem and critical thinking skills
Roselina Shakir (2008)**			To highlight soft skills being required by the ministry of higher education,	Seven soft skills are communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, team work, lifelong learning and

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
			Malaysia	information management skills, entrepreneurship skills, ethics, and professional moral and leadership skills in the development of human capital
Smith and Krüger (2008)**	Random probability sampling technique with self-administered questionnaire	435 final year business management student	to investigate empirically the generic skills level of potential Business Management graduates and to provide generic skills inventory checklist for curriculum developers	The generic skills identified during the study were: Basic skills, Communication skills, Management Skills, Environmental awareness Skills, Intellectual Skills, Self and Career Management Skills, Interpersonal
Martin et al. (2009)**	In-depth interviews	persons in charge of human resources and/or	To identify employability skills being needed	14 employability skills: communication, team-working, problem-solving,

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
		company directors, and from a questionnaire targeting 872 companies surveyed from a data base of the 5,000 main Spanish companies		literacy, numeracy, general information technology (IT), timekeeping, business awareness, customer-care, personal presentation, enthusiasm/commitment, enterprising, vocational job-seeking and advanced vocational job-specific skills
Meenakshi Sharma (2009)	Questionnaire	About 50 mid-level to top level executives from about 4-5 companies in India	To determine the importance of soft skills for getting a job and for further promotions and progress in the workplace and also to identify the soft skills being needed for each	Top three must-have soft skills to succeed at the workplace are communication skills, teamwork and time management.

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
			management position	
Whitelaw et al. (2009)*	Focus group	Senior hospitality industry managers	To analyse the skills, characteristics, and attributes needed for success in hospitality and tourism industry	Educators and industry professionals disagree on the skills required for hospitality managers to be successful.
Furnham et al. (2010)**	previous literature review	based on previous literature	To create soft skills inventory based on previous literature	self-management, communicational, interpersonal, team-working, the ability to work under pressure, imagination or creativity, critical thinking, willingness to learn, attention to detail, taking responsibility, planning and organizing, insight, maturity, professionalism, and emotional intelligence

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Lowden et al. (2011)**		employers	To identify the broader skills and attributes being deemed by the employers	Four distinct themes are Adding value immediately, Understanding of process / environment, Skills in team work, Confidence
Spowart (2011)*		65 final-year hospitality management students in South Africa	To determine which skills the students perceived as the most important before and after work-integrated learning experience	Customer service and the ability and willingness to learn were considered the two most important competencies
Adnan et al. (2012)	Questionnaire and interview	50 employers from organizations that are listed for placement of final year student internship program	to identify the key soft skills being needed for real estate sectors	Ethic and professionalism has the highest relative weight.

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Robles (2012)	Interview by students	90 Business executive	To identify top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace	Integrity and communication were ranked as the most important skills
Sukhwinder Singh Jolly (2012)**			To identify the soft skill being needed for employability of engineering graduates	7 top ranked skills are Communicative Skills, Critical thinking and problem solving skills, Team work, Life-long, Learning and Information Management skills, Entrepreneurship skills, Ethics, Moral & professional, Leadership skills
Deepa S et al. (2013)	Questionnaire and in-depth interview	160 mid-level to top level executive in India	To find out the importance that middle to top level executives, who are involved in recruiting employees,	Soft skills are indeed very important to succeed at the work place and communication skills is ranked to be the most important soft skills

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
			attach to soft skills	
Lisa G. et al. (2013)	Online survey	Industry professionals and hospitality educators (for the second round) the past 5 years' graduates of a mid-western university's hospitality management program (final round)	To determine which competencies alumni of an undergraduate hospitality program, perceive to be most important in their careers and whether a significant difference exists in essential competencies	These findings support those of most other studies, indicating that the competencies that are most essential for managers to be successful in hospitality are soft ones. The two most essential soft competencies in this study were developing positive customer relations and working effectively with peers.
Windels et al. (2013)**	field observations, formal interviews, and informal conversations	six advertising firms	to explore soft skills important in the advertising industry	the four most useful skills were critical thinking, interpersonal communication, presentation, and persuasion skills

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
Chavan and Surve (2014)**	Questionnaire survey	employers	To assess parameters of employability skills from employers' perspective	14 essential employability skills were defined. Integrity and honesty, problem solving, team work, self-confidence, communication skills are highly ranked amongst the skills demanded by employers.
Kelebogile Paadi (2014)**			To find perception on employability skills necessary to enhance human resource management graduates, prospects of securing a relevant place in the labour market	team work, communication, analytic and critical thinking and computer skills are the most sought after skills or desirable graduate

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
N. Seetha (2014)**			To explore and examine the importance of soft skills competencies at the Malaysian workplace and to identify critical soft skills that are needed at the workplace	Communication skills, positive attitude, teamwork are the top 3 ranked skills
Laura et al. (2015)**		employers	To identify key soft skills that foster youth workforce success	Five critical skills are identified; social skills, communication, higher-order thinking skills, the intrapersonal skills of self-control and positive self-concept
Raman & Koka (2015)**	Survey		to understand the importance and requirements of soft skills in the IT industry	Top 5 skills are problem solving skills (98%), communication skills (92%), interpersonal skills (88%), time management skills

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
			and also the causes behind the lack of soft skills in students	(65%) and team building skills (43%)
Sangamitra & Priya (2015)**			To identify the required soft skills for employability	8 skills were considered important from employability point of view; Collaboration / teamwork, Communication skills, Initiative, Leadership ability, People development /coaching, Personal effectiveness / personal mastery, Planning and organizing, and Listening skills
Shukla & Kumar (2017)	Longitudinal study	Extensive longitudinal study of the research over the last 12 years	To bring out the key soft skills which are demanded by the employers in	A list of critical soft skills strongly deemed for the workplace success are; communication skills, leadership skills, team

Table 2.1 Summary of Findings from Previous Research on Job Skills (cont.)

Author	Approach	Source of Data	Purpose	Findings
			the corporate world	building skills, strategic thinking skills, critical thinking skills, analytical & problem solving, interpersonal skills, imagination or creativity, presentation skills.

*the data was adapted from the table 1 Literature Review Summary: Essential Competencies in Hospitality Management Studies in the research study “Essential Hospitality Management Competencies: The Importance of Soft Skills” of Lisa G. Sisson MM RD & Allison R. Adams MBA (2013)

**the data was adapted from the summary of the literature review in the research study “the Essential Soft Skills for Employability – A Longitudinal Study” of Anju Shukla and Gopika Kumar (2017)

2.3 The definition of Job Performance

As anecdotal evidence indicated, every organization has been established with certain missions and objectives to achieve. These objectives could be achieved by utilizing various kinds of resources e.g. workforce, machine, raw materials and financial support etc. Though all mentioned resources were crucial for the existence and well-being of the business, the most crucial one was the workforce. Besides, today’s workforce has experienced tremendous changes and the business environment was changing drastically due to advances in Technology; consequently, the question arose that how these resources were utilized.

Today, for every organization, it was tough to start, survive, stabilize and excel in the business. The firm having competitive advantage through their talented and

dedicated workforce could take the lead in the market. The contribution of employees on their job was the most important factor for development and excellence in business. The job performance of each individual employee was needed to drive the success of the business unit or department, to accomplish the company's goal and eventually to grab the emerging opportunity in the market. (Neely, 1999)

Job Performance has been defined as the overall expected value from employees' behaviours carried out over the course of a set period of time (Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmidt 1997 cited in Carmeli et al. 2007). In 1990, Campbell endorsed that job performance was not a single action of doing a job but rather a complex activity of an individual (Ibrahim, 2017). Performance in a job was strictly a behaviour and a separate entity from the outcomes of a particular job which related to the success and the productivity of the company.

Numerous job performance measures have been used over the past years as criterion measures (cf. Campbell, 1990; Campbell, Gasser, & Oswald, 1996; Cleveland, Murphy, & Williams, 1989 cited in Viswesvaran, 1996). Besides, various attempts have also been made to identify the specifications for these criteria. Blum and Naylor (1968) identified 11 dimensions of characteristics on which the different criteria could be evaluated, while Brogden (1946) identified relevance, reliability, and practicality as desired characteristics for criteria (Viswesvaran, 1996). Reliability of criteria has been included as an important consideration by all authors writing about job performance measurement.

Of the various different methods to measure job performance of each individual employee, performance ratings were the most widespread. However, ratings were subjective evaluations that could be 360-degree obtained from all stakeholders e.g. supervisors, peers, subordinates, customers and self. However, the most commonly used source was the feedback form supervisors (Cascio, 1991).

To conclude, according to Eccles (1991), the overall effectiveness and productivity of an organization have always been attributed to high job performance, because it has been regarded as a core concept. Hence, the continual assessment and monitoring of staff job performance have predominantly contributed to organizational success.

2.4 The effect of Soft Skills on Job Performance

To measure employee performance could be done in various methods such as the Balanced Scorecard, which allowed the staff to align its strategic activities to the strategic plan. Each organization had its own different way to measure the staff performance depending on its objective. In addition, there have been various attempts to identify the specifications for these criteria. However, one of the most important criteria being included in almost all staff evaluations was the possession of soft skills.

Based on numerous studies over the past decades, it was found that more than half of the criteria in the job assessment tool was to assess the individual's soft skills, which referred to leadership skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills etc. (Viswesvaran, 1993; Wohlers & London, 1989)

Individual job performance significantly increased when soft skills were possessed and applied by employees (Homer, 2001). Ibrahim et al. (2017) reported a strong empirical support for the causal relationship between soft skills acquired by employees and their job performance. Also, the more employees acquired and used their soft skills, the more they developed positive behaviour and attitude towards their job, and hence this led to a better job performance.

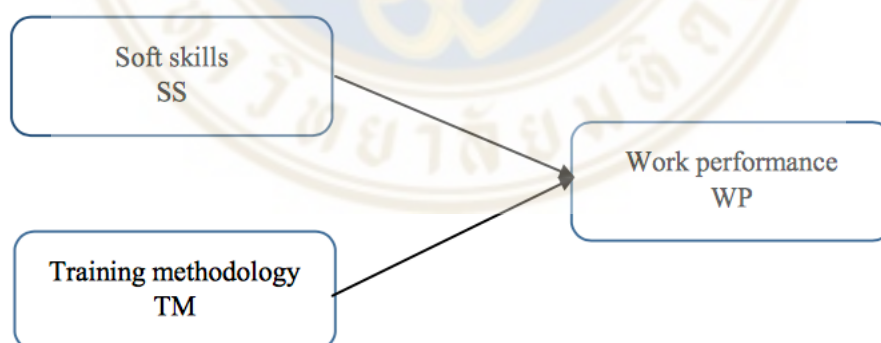


Figure 2.2 Conceptual model of the soft skills training, training methodology and work performance (Ibrahim et al., 2017)

Izadikhah et al. (2010) also confirmed that there was a significant link between soft skills and job performance and the staff with high level of soft skills were likely to show better work performance compared to others (Ibrahim et al., 2017).

2.5 Career Success: The meaning of career advancement

A career advancement means that a person was selected to perform an advanced job tasks, because he or she has shown great competence in his or her present job task and has shown that he or she had the potential to do job tasks in a higher level with more complexity and responsibility.

Based on thorough literature review, the concept of promotion was differently defined by a number of researchers. According to Beach (1975), promotion was the mobility of an individual from a particular rank to a higher level (Mustaffa and Shokory, 2006). Most of the time, such career advancement was always related to a higher ranking in the organization, a higher rate of salary, the increment in power and responsibility (Rudermann, 1995). In addition, the criteria such as education, experience and personality were always also taken into consideration (Frank, 1998).

Meanwhile, previous studies (Judge and Bretz, 1994; Vardi, 1980) have referred the organizational career advancement to the process of career movement as extrinsic career success, in 2007, Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg revealed that organizational career advancement was an objective assessment of an employee's career movement, either via hierarchical advancement or horizontal mobility. In their study, the term organizational career advancement was used in reference to two dimensions: career mobility and career prospects.

In 2007, Loscertales revealed that the opportunities in career advancement could be viewed from the perspectives of both within the organization (intra-organization) and between organizations (Heimler, 2012). In the past, it was common to remain and advance within a single organization over a career, but career paths now clearly included working for more than one organization (Clough, 2008 cited in Heimler, 2012).

2.6 Considerations in organizational career advancement

Organizations had different criteria for employee promotion. Some might not even have formal selection methods. However, past work performance were always taken into account for such consideration (Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg, 2007) but

nowadays soft skills quality had become one of the most important criteria to select the right candidate for promotion (Meenakshi, 2009; Robles, 2012).

2.6.1 Modelling the promotional process

It was utmost important to be able to select the right employee for the higher position. There were many methods and steps of how to select employees for promotion, which were different from one company to another. In general, the most common and best practice were to have those potential staff undergoing a written test and interviews. Given its importance, it was surprising that only little empirical research has focused on the employee promotion process. This lack of attention was likely in view of the fact that the relevant data to the promotion criteria and promotion process were frequently considered as highly confidential by organizations. Consequently, the data gathering was always difficult and complicated. In order to provide a basic general framework for future study, Figure 3 provided a model of how the promotion process was likely to unfold in many organizations (Breugh, 2011).

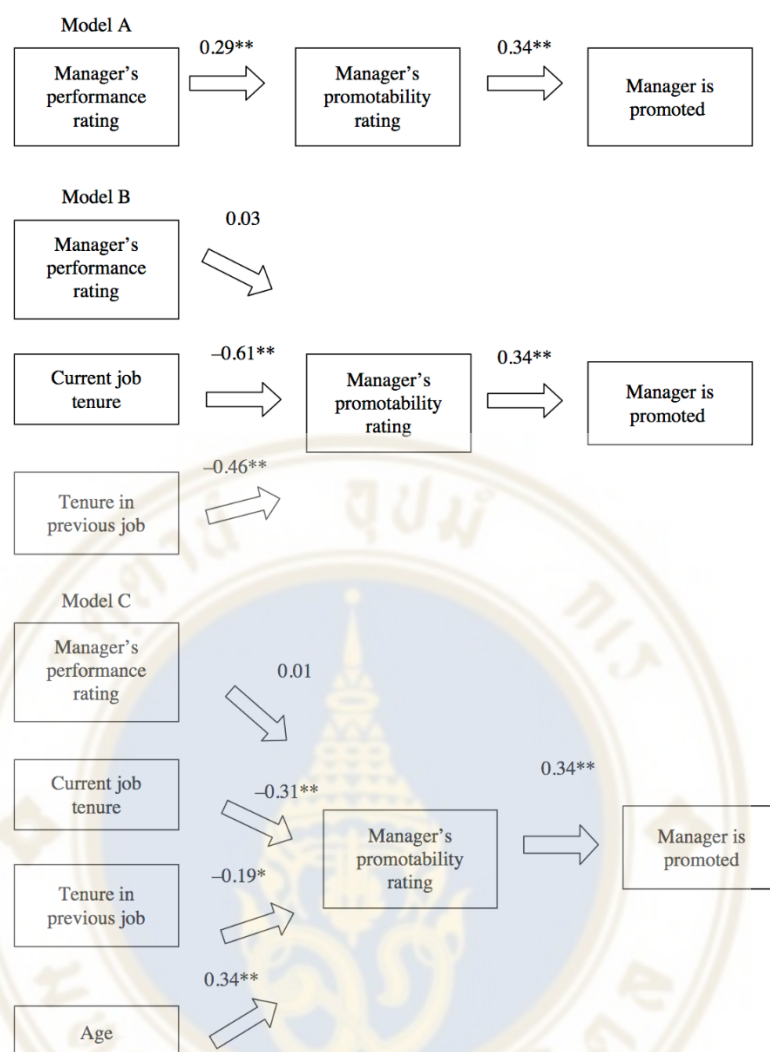


Figure 2.3 Hypothesized models of the promotion process (Breugh, 2011)

As portrayed in Figure 2.3, based on the research study on modelling the managerial promotion process by Breugh in 2011, it was revealed that the factors of manager's past performance, current job tenure, prior job tenure and the decision maker's age bias significantly influence on how the person was rated with regard to ability to be promoted.

2.6.2 Criteria related to promotion

According to the research of Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg in 2007, it was revealed that various elements were behind advancement decisions and career success such as demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, race, age, marital status, tenure) (e.g.

Greenhaus et al., 1990; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), personality traits (e.g. Judge et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert and Kraimer, 2001; Seibert et al., 2001), similarities in decision makers' personalities (Schaubroeck and Lam, 2002) and social background similarities (Markham et al., 1987), employment gaps (Judiesch and Lyness, 1999; Schneer and Reitman, 1990), social capital (Seibert et al., 2001), and human capital (Wayne et al., 1999).

On the contrary, in 2001, Chung and Leung commented that the research on promotion decisions in any business environment was quite limited and has been described as the most underexplored area of organizational effectiveness. In addition, it was highlighted that very few studies have actually asked managers on what kind of criteria were used in their promotion or how they decided on the promotion.

Though an extensive literature review and search of the research on promotions were carefully and thoroughly performed, not even a single study, which focused specifically on rapidly changing organizations and which used real world managers who were either looking to be promoted and/or made the promotion decisions concerning other managers, was revealed (Longenecker and Fink, 2008).

Nonetheless, Chung and Leung (2001) suggested that mistakes in promotional decision making could lead to the very poor results for the organization due to the irreconcilability between current qualifications and experience and the requirements of the new position to which they were being promoted. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the problems of irreconcilability were tremendously increased in situations where the "old rules" were applied. Hence, the organization, who ignored the change in its business environment and continued to apply their old promotional criteria, would definitely have difficulties in surviving the world of business as they could not fill up the position with the suitable person. In addition, the suitable person might be disappointed and desperately left the organization. Therefore, the promotional criteria would have to be consistently reviewed and revised and also must reflect this new reality (Longenecker and Fink, 2008).

2.6.3 The causal relationship between Job Performance and Career Advancement

According to the theory of signalling (Spence, 1973, 1974), it was suggested that organizations did not possess the complete information regarding the past experience of a current employee especially the new applicants. Therefore, other kinds of signal such as education background was used to identify the capability of these applicants. Meanwhile, one of the main signals to identify the capability for promotion of the current employee was how well an employee has been performing his/her job. (Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg, 2007).

Job Performance rating played a vital role in the promotion decision process (Greenhaus et al., 1990, 1993). It was confirmed time after time that employees, who were appreciated for their achievements at work, enjoyed relatively high organizational career advancement. Based on study of Schaubroeck and Lam in 2002, a strong correlation between job performance and promotion decision in two different countries; Hong Kong and USA was revealed.

Based on all above literature review, it was led to the hypothesis of Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg in 2007 that employees who performed their job successfully would have better chances for career advancement and it was as well pinpointed after the study that the job performance was a key variable that managers tended to rely on when estimating their employee's promotion prospects.

	Model 1 β (t)		Model 2 β (t)	
	Career mobility		Promotion prospects	
Constant ^a	1.03	(1.95**)	2.67	(3.93****)
Sector (1 = service)	0.13	(1.78*)	0.09	(1.34)
R^2	0.02		0.02	
F for R^2	2.65*		2.89*	
Organizational tenure	0.18	(2.14**)	-0.15	(-1.95**)
Gender (1 = female)	0.06	(0.65)	-0.06	(-0.69)
Income	0.05	(0.52)	0.05	(0.53)
Education	0.17	(2.03**)	0.13	(1.60*)
ΔR^2	0.20		0.10	
F for ΔR^2	13.56****		5.95****	
Absenteeism	-0.18	(-2.57**)	-0.05	(-0.82)
Lateness	-0.17	(-2.22**)	0.01	(0.20)
Overtime	0.22	(2.72***)	0.10	(1.34)
Altruism	0.05	(0.71)	0.08	(1.16)
Compliance	0.03	(0.41)	0.12	(1.70*)
Job performance	0.14	(1.96**)	0.49	(7.35****)
ΔR^2	0.12		0.30	
F for ΔR^2	4.18****		12.62****	
Overall R^2	0.34		0.42	
F for overall R^2	7.45****		10.64****	

Notes: * $p \leq 0.10$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; *** $p \leq 0.01$; **** $p \leq 0.001$, ^aUnstandardized coefficient

Figure 2.4 Hierarchical regression results of the relationship behaviors, contextual and between withdrawal job performance, and career advancement (Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg, 2007)

Based on figure 2.4, the result showed that the job performance was significant related to the promotion prospects.

To conclude this section, the findings on several studies validate that the job performance was the only major predictor of promotion prospects. (Greenhaus et al., 1990,1993; Schaubroeck and Lam, 2002; Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg, 2007)

Gunz and Jalland (1996) revealed the correlation between the personality and career success at the individual level of analysis. Based on this finding and on social learning theories (Bandura, 1986, 1977a, 1977b; Rotter, 1982, 1975), in 1999, Lau and Shaffer has developed a theoretical framework and testable hypotheses linking the relationship between certain personality traits and career success. The several personality traits e.g. locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, optimism and Machiavellianism along with the job performance and person-environment fit were proposed to be determinants of career success.

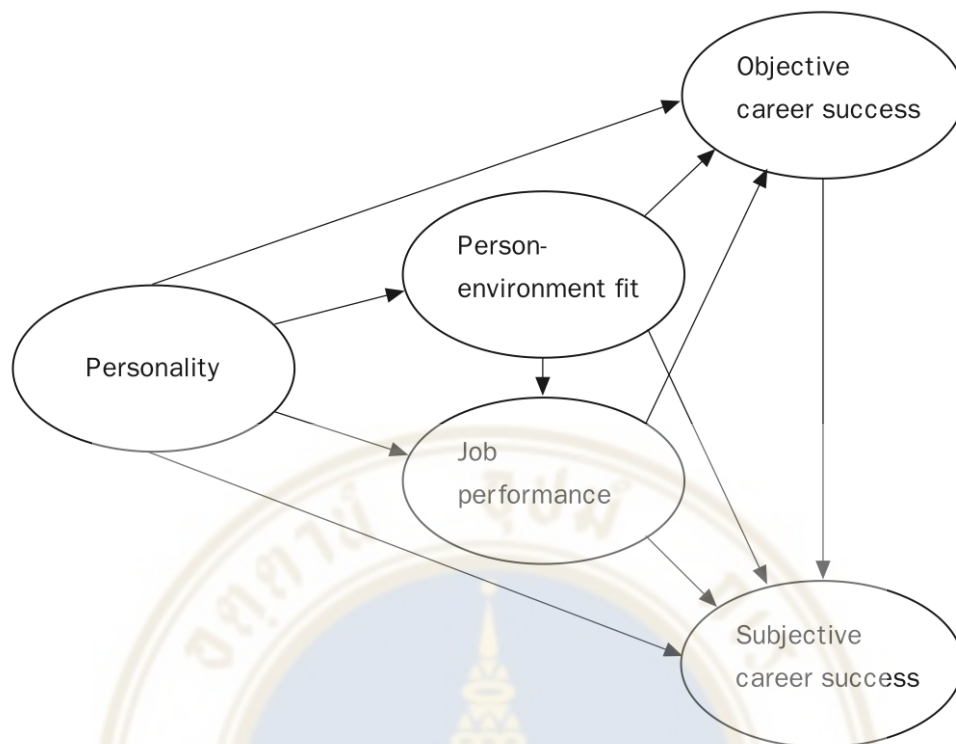


Figure 2.5 A conceptual model of career success (Lau & Schaffer, 1999)

2.7 Soft Skills needed for Career Advancement

In 1999, Weisenger endorsed the other several researchers that based on several empirical data being released time after time, it was shown that soft skills were another variable to reckon with when it came to organization's performance. Recent developments in the interest in soft skill competencies appeared to be connected to work success.

Meenakshi Sharma (2009) reported that 96% of mid-level to top-level executive respondents in India agreed that they considered soft skills along with other technical skills as criteria for promotion.

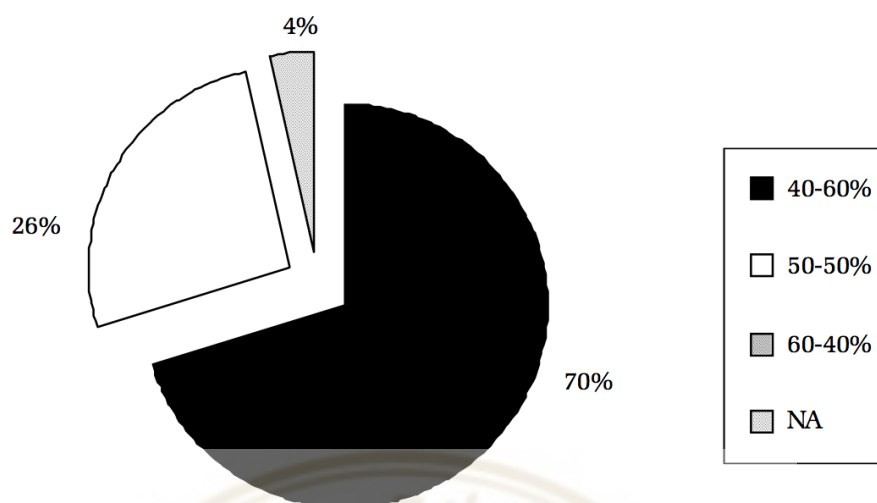


Figure 2.6 Weightage to Soft Skills for Lower Management Positions (Meenakshi, 2009)

Heimler, Rosenberg and Morote (2010) found that soft skills were shown to be predominant contributors to recent graduates' career advancement potential.

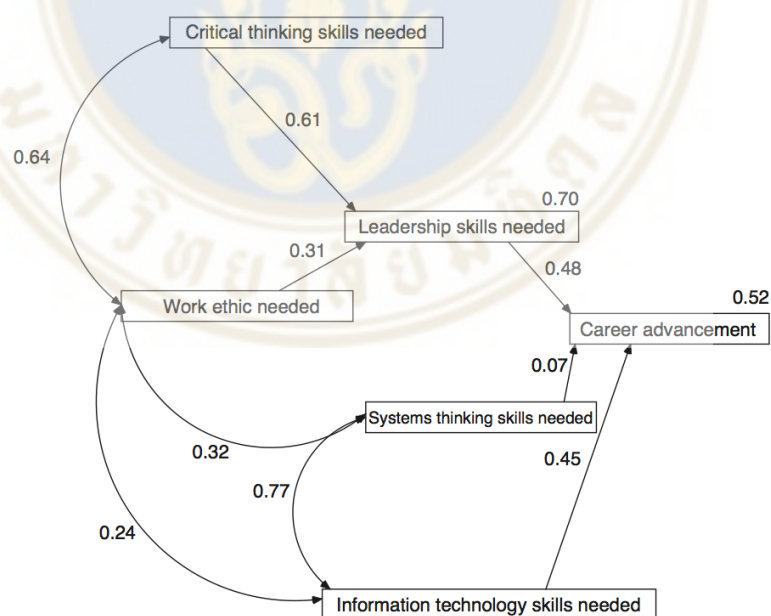


Figure 2.7 Structural equation model for human resource managers for the variables related to basic employability skills needed for job performance that predict career advancement (Heimler, Rosenberg and Morote, 2010)

According to figure 2.7, it could be concluded that the human resource managers considered leadership skill to be the largest contributor among the basic employability skills needed for job performance towards career advancement potential (Heimler, Rosenberg and Morote, 2010).

During speaking on the importance of soft skills for MBA students, distinguished academician Prof. Henry Mintzberg referred to the crucial soft skills; leadership, teamwork, communication and the ability to think outside the box of a discipline that separated the rest in the management world, meanwhile the annual rankings of MBA colleges as well often placed communication and interpersonal skills as the most decisive skills needed for career success in the corporate world (Deepa and Manisha, 2013).

Another study on developing soft skills in vocation high school graduates talked about the essential of developing soft skills in students for their betterment and future career growth.

In recent times, companies were continuing to rate their employees' interpersonal skills as more important than their analytical abilities. It was often said that hard skills would get you an interview but you needed soft skills to get a job. Success was nowadays based not only on what you knew but also on how you could communicate it (Klaus, 2010).

Getting back to Aviation Industry, as soft skills were considered the most important qualification needed for airline business, it had to be evaluated and measured as to what the level of the quality of soft skills the employee was in the procession of (Meenakshi, 2009; Deepa & Manisha, 2013).

Airline Business was somehow different from any other service business as though service elements played a big role in routine job, the concern of safety was as well defined as no compromised policy. Consequently, on one hand, the interpersonal skills and communication skills were crucial to handle various types of stakeholders e.g. airline passengers, business partners, authorities, colleagues as well as all kinds stakeholders related to the process of an airline in an effective manner. On another hand, as a matter of fact that due to huge number of strict regulations based on both safety and security policy, the most important qualifications, which people in the level of leadership in airline industry needed to have, was having several kinds of soft skills e.g.

negotiation skills, emotional stability, tactfulness, problem solving skills, intercultural skills, time management and work under pressure and stress etc.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Promotion is a sensitive and subjective issue as different organizations have different ways to consider the promotion for their employees. Many organizations do not have any formal selection methods, while others may have concrete and complex processes to find the eligible employees. Though, the working performance is the criteria, being always taken into consideration, the soft skills are also one of the most important criteria in organization to find the suitable and eligible person to be selected for career advancement (Meenakshi, 2009; Robles, 2012).

Hence, in order to understand the complexity of the issue, the researcher needs to carefully and thoroughly design the research process, methodology and analysis to find out more what kind of soft skills are mostly needed by each group of airlines. The first part will explain rational behind selecting the type of research and why researcher has chosen this type. Later, the researcher will also further provide with more information on the target respondents and discuss in details for research data collection and analysis strategy.

This study is a survey study aimed to discover the most essential Soft Skills, which the airline high-level managers take into consideration that they are most important for staff to be promoted to higher position especially to the first level management position. The survey was carried out at “Suvarnabhumi” Bangkok International Airport, Thailand. Several surveys were used to collect the data in this study. The same survey was also distributed to the educators in order to find the gaps between identified essential soft skills by the practitioners and the educators. In addition, the final result of the required soft skills for promotion being identified by the practitioners was also tested with the current first level managers in order to see the alignment. This chapter is composed of:

- (1) Overview of the Research Process
- (2) Type of Research
- (3) Target Respondents (Population & Samples)

- (3.1) Airliners with high-level management position
- (3.2) Educators in Aviation Program
- (3.3) Airliners with first level management position
- (4) Timeframe
- (5) Research Instrument
 - (5.1) Quality of Research Instrument
 - (5.2) Testing of Research Instrument: Validity Test
- (6) Data Collection
- (7) Data Analysis

3.1 Overview of the Research Process

Research is generally a process of generating questions from specified problems, selecting samples and measuring, collecting, analysing data to answer the questions. In this research study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Specifically, in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data. The research process to conduct the data collection and data analysis of this research study are as follows;

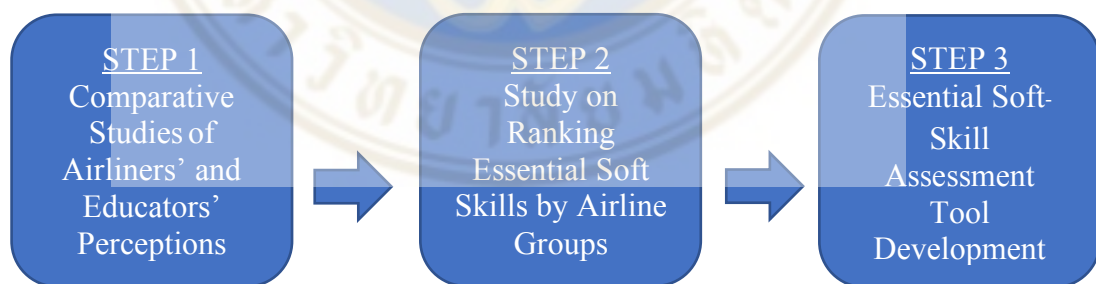


Figure 3.1 The illustrated display of research process

Overview of Research Process

Table 3.1 the illustrated table of research process

Overview of Research Process
<p>Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specify and justify a problem and generate the Statement of Problem(s) 2. Formulate Research Questions towards Research Problem 3. Extract 70 soft skills from literature review 4. Develop instrument including the surveys and include questions about demographics, and employment history 5. Perform the contents validity, clarity and readability check with both practitioners and educators (Index of Item-Objective Congruence Method : IOC) 6. Identify 10 top essential soft skills by the practitioners 7. Identify 10 top essential soft skills by the educators 8. Analyze the data by using statistical methods to summarize and interpret the findings and as well compare the results from two sample groups for further conclusion
<p>Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the final survey based from the identified most 10 needed soft skills from the view of Airlines 2. Make an interview with high-level management position airlines to identify the needs of each soft skill for career advancement by using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique with pairwise method 3. Analyze the data by using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique to summarize and rank the most needed soft skills for each group of airlines

Table 3.1 the illustrated table of research process (cont.)

Overview of Research Process
<p>Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an assessment tool to identify the potential career advancement based on research study result 2. Perform the contents validity, clarity and readability check with both practitioners and educators (IOC) 3. Distribute the final assessment sheet, being developed from the result of the survey, to the Airlines with first entry level management position to identify their possessed soft skills in order to confirm the reliability of the result of final survey from high-level management position 4. Compare the results from both stakeholders for further conclusion

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In order to start the process, the Statement of Problems have been specified and the Research Questions towards Research Problems have been formulated.

Through extensive literature review and previous survey instruments related to soft skills and career advancement, a list of 204 competencies sorted by knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) were identified. A group of industry professionals were interviewed to short-list them down to the top 70 soft skills. The list of 70 soft skills together with 6 questions were evaluated for content validity, clarity, and readability with the method of Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC).

Based on the data from Airline Operators Committee and the Taro Yamane formula, the required population size for the first step research is 60. On another hand, based on the data from Office of Higher Education Commission, 2017, there were a total of 23 universities across Thailand offering bachelor's programs in the field of Aviation Management (Office of Higher Education Commission, 2017). At this stage, the list of 70 potential soft skills was reduced to top 10 most essential soft skills applicable across the area of ground passenger service handling in the view of airlines.

The result of each step was analysed using several statistical methods including descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations to rank the order of importance of the skills in the first few steps. Given the nominal level of perception measurement, Chi-square test was employed to test whether perception means of practitioners and educators are significantly different.

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

In order to look into the real needs of each group of airlines, the final survey based from the identified most 10 needed soft skills from the view of Airlines was developed.

Based on the same data from the first step, the population size of the second step was also 60. In this step, all respondents were interviewed in person to identify the needs of each soft skill for career advancement by using AHP technique with pairwise method. Ultimately, the ranking list of top 10 most essential soft skills applicable across the area of ground passenger service handling in the view of practitioners in each group of airlines was identified.

The result was analysed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique to summarize and rank the order of importance of the skills for each group of airlines. Radar charts were initiated to present the result of each airline group and also to present the results in comparison among each airline group.

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

Through extensive literature review and previous assessment tools related to soft skills and career advancement, a final assessment tool to identify the potential career advancement based on research study result was developed and designed.

The final assessment tool, which consisted of 50 multiple choices questions, was evaluated for content validity, clarity, and readability with the method of Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Eventually, the questions were filtered to only 30 multiple choices questions - 3 questions per each soft skill.

In this step, the data were mainly collected through the survey method in order to identify their possessed soft skills in order to confirm the reliability of the result

of final survey from high-level management position. Both Thai and English questionnaires were sent by e-mails to the Airlines with first entry level management position and could be completed using online, offline, and face-to-face methods. Follow-up telephone calls were consequently made to enhance the rate of response.

3.2 Type of Research

The qualitative research was defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as any type of research that the finding was produced not by any statistical process or any mean of quantification. In addition, in 2005 Polkinghorne also highlighted that the qualitative research applied inquiry process that aimed to describe and clarify human experience as it occurs in their lives.

The quantitative research is the systematic empirical investigation of observable phenomena via statistical, mathematical or computational techniques (Given, 2008). The objective of quantitative research is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and hypotheses pertaining to phenomena.

The researcher well noted of the limitations and strengths of each method. Hence, in order to achieve all objectives of this study, both quantitative research methodology and qualitative approach were used in the research as follows.

3.3 Population, Sampling, Samples

As a matter of fact, that to understand the holistic view of the topic is a crucial part of the study, it is critical to identify various groups of target respondents, who can provide range of data from different perspectives to support the valid research findings. The target respondents in this research are grouped as follows;

3.3.1 Airlines with high-level management position

Based on the assumption that the high-level managers are the best respondent group to predict the career advancement potential and the first-level managers are simply not engaged enough to the promotion process, the list of high-level

managers will be thoroughly studied and the cluster sampling method will be used respectively.

The sample of this research is calculated by using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Based on the member list data of Airline Operators Committee, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport, 2017, the total population is 80 airlines. However, after going through the list, it was found that only 70 out of 80 airlines, who operate the passenger flights for the whole year. Consequently, the total population size was decreased to 70 airlines.

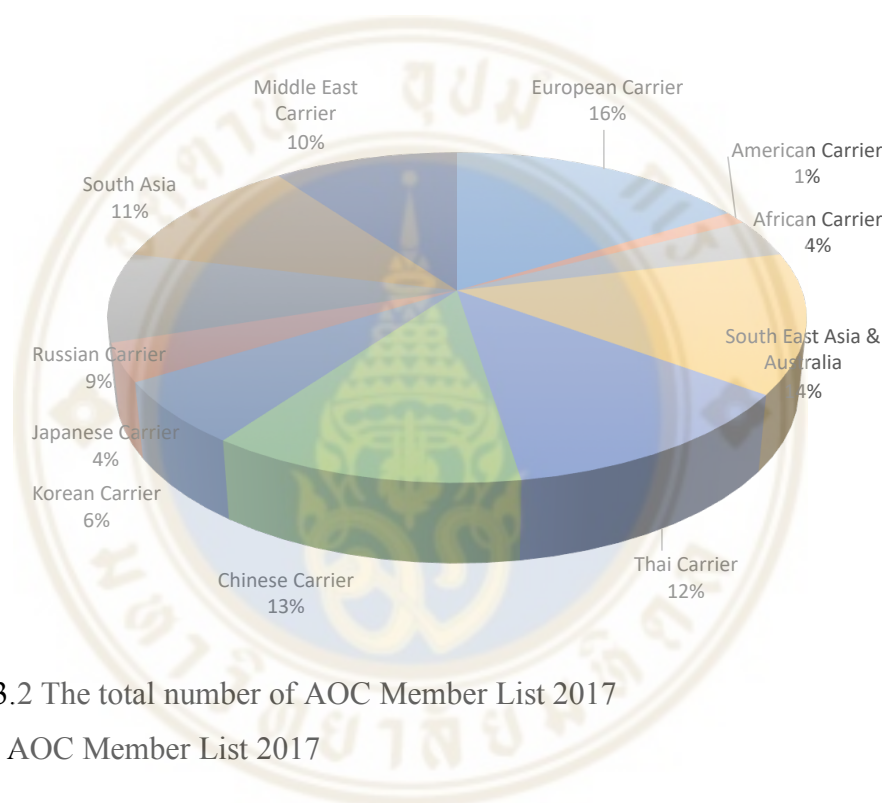


Figure 3.2 The total number of AOC Member List 2017

Source: AOC Member List 2017

Figure 3.2 displays the total number of 80 airline members of Airline Operators Committee at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport. All airlines were initially grouped as per their country of origin.

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In order to ease the data analysis process and to analyse the difference between perceptions of airlines in each airline group, the researcher has grouped all 70 airlines operating passenger flights for the whole year based on their country of origin.

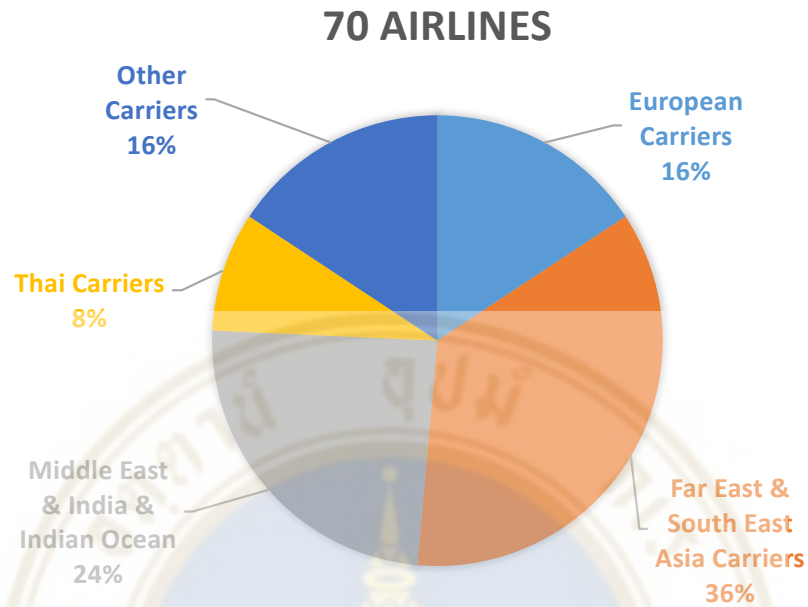


Figure 3.3 All 5 airline groups for this research study in the first survey round.

The calculation formula of Taro Yamane is presented as following;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = the sample size required

N = the population size under study

e = the acceptable sampling error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$n = \frac{70}{1+70(.05)^2}$$

$$n = 60 \text{ (rounded up)}$$

Based on the above calculation of the sample size by substituting the numbers into the Yamane formula, the number of sample is 59.5745 persons. In order to obtain the reliable data, the researcher has increased the sample size to 60 persons.

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

In order to better analyse the difference between perceptions of airliners in each airline group, the researcher decided to regroup all 70 airlines operating passenger flights for the whole year based on their country of origin into 5 main airline groups as follows; Thai Carriers (6), Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers(17), Far East & South East Asia Carriers(25), European Carriers (9) and Other Carriers (13).

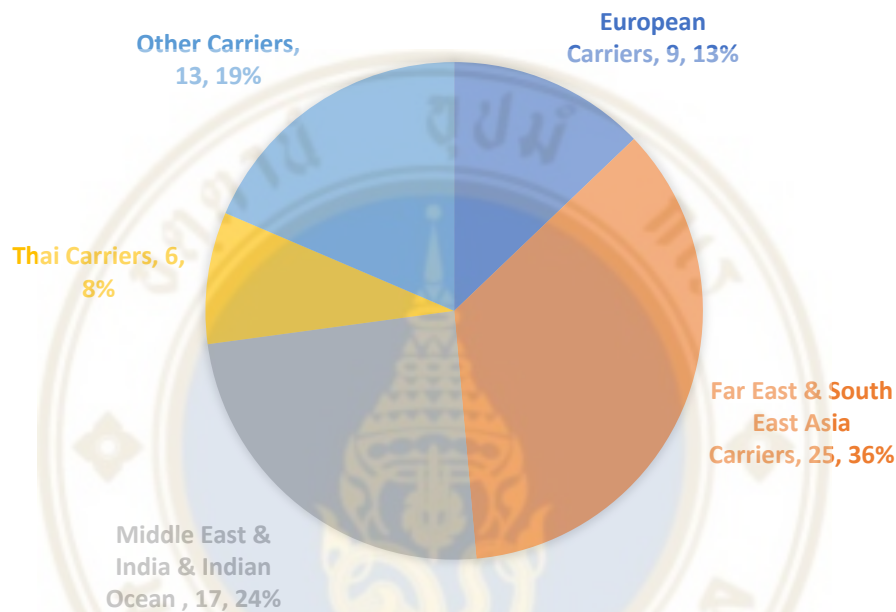


Figure 3.4 All 5 airline groups for this research study in the second survey round.

The calculation formula of Taro Yamane is presented as following;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = the sample size required

N = the population size under study

e = the acceptable sampling error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$n = \frac{70}{1+70(.05)^2}$$

$$n = 60 \text{ (rounded up)}$$

Based on the above calculation of the sample size by substituting the numbers into the Yamane formula, the number of sample is 59.5745 persons. In order to obtain the reliable data, the researcher has increased the sample size to 60 persons.

3.3.2 Educators in Aviation Program

The sample of this research is calculated by using the purposive sampling technique. According to the data of the Office of Higher Education Commission, 2017, there were a total of 23 universities across Thailand offering bachelor's programs in the field of Aviation Management. So, the participants are current educators at 23 universities, offering Bachelor's Programs with concentration in Aviation Management or related fields. The calculation is presented as follows;

⇒ Excluding the Civil Aviation Training Center (CATC), who was established solely to produce and develop aviation personnel, the estimated number of the lecturers in related fields of Aviation Program at other educational institutions ranged from 1-15 persons depending on the estimated number of the students per semester at each university. In this study, the minimum number of 5 educators per university is used to estimate the sample size.

⇒ Based on above assumption, the calculation of the number of participants is presented as following;

$$a = b * c$$

Where:

a = estimated sample size

b = number of universities

c = number of lecturers from each university participating in the study

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$a = 23 * 5$$

$$a = \underline{115}$$

Based on the above calculation of the sample size by substituting the numbers into the formula, the number of sample is 115 persons. In order to obtain the reliable data, the researcher has expected to receive an adequate sample size of

minimum 14.02% responses as similar studies had response rates ranging from 328 responses equalling 14.02% of the sample (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004) to 56 responses equalling 41.2% of the sample (Wilson et al., 2000) (Sisson & Adams, 2013).

3.3.3 Airliners with first-level management position

The sample of this research was calculated by using the convenience sampling technique. All participants were first-level airline managers, working at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport. According to the member list data of Airline Operators Committee, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport, 2017, there were 70 registered airlines identifying themselves as Passenger Carrier and operating with the year-round service. The calculation is presented as following;

- ⇒ The estimated number of the first-level airline managers is around 2-40 persons depending on the size of their operations, which normally related to the number of flight movements, the type of aircrafts and the number of passengers. In this study, the minimum number of 3 staff is used to estimate the sample size.
- ⇒ Based on above assumption, the calculation of the number of participants is presented as following;

$$a = b * c$$

Where:

a = estimated sample size

b = number of registered airlines

c = number of staff of each airline participating in the study

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$a = 70 * 3$$

$$a = \underline{210}$$

Based on the above calculation of the sample size by substituting the numbers into the formula, the number of sample is 210 persons. In order to obtain the reliable data, the researcher has expected to receive an adequate sample size of minimum 14.02% responses or equivalent to 30 persons.

3.4 Time Frame

The duration of data collection of this study was lasted from the December 9th, 2017 to the 28th of March 2018 and the duration of each survey step can be identified as following;

3.4.1 Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The time taken for the first survey with high-level airline managers was around two weeks from December 9th to December 24th, 2017, while the time taken for the survey with educators was much longer as a matter of fact, that the data from the educators would be used at last for the comparison purpose and not to be used to develop the second survey. So, the time taken for this step was almost two months between December 9th, 2017 to January 31st, 2018.

3.4.2 Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

The time taken for this step of data collection was around one month from December 25th, 2017 to January 31st, 2018.

3.4.3 Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

As a matter of fact, that the data being received from this step would be used at last for the confirmation purpose, in order to gain the maximum number of participants, the researcher decided to open this online and off-line survey for almost 2 months between February 10th, 2018 to March 18th, 2018.

3.5 Research Instrument

The surveys were used to gather data from sample groups. In order to achieve all the research objectives, total 2 questionnaire and 1 assessment sheet were applied. The first and the second survey were prepared only in English as foreign

practitioners and educators were involved, while the third assessment tool was prepared in both English and Thai. The first questionnaire comprised three parts. They were 1) personal information, 2) questions regarding whether soft skills were essentials, and 3) the top ten essential skills. The first part was close-ended questions while the second part was 5-point Likert scale statements with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree. The second questionnaire comprised two parts. They were 1) personal information, and 2) the pairwise comparison questions. The last assessment sheet comprised only one part, which is the multiple choice test consisting of 50 questions. A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the survey among a small group of practitioners and educators prior to survey distribution to the whole sample groups.

3.5.1 Research Instrument:

The survey research is a commonly used method of collecting the information about a population of interest. In this research study, two sets of surveys and one assessment sheet were distributed to the sample groups at each certain period of time. The questions in each survey and assessment sheet are classified in to parts as follows;

Survey #1 for the first step: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

This survey was designed for data collection purpose from both practitioners and educators. The questionnaire comprised three parts as follows;

Part 1: Personal Information

In this part, the respondents were asked about their personal and demographic information. The questions in this part were close-ended questions. However, the respondents had a choice to reject providing any information in this part.

Part 2: Perception Towards Soft Skills and Current Workforce.

In this part, there were 6 questions regarding whether soft skills were essential and the perception and satisfaction towards current workforce. This part was 5-point-Likert scale statements with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree. The questions in this part of the questionnaire were developed from the

research paper entitled “How Important Are Soft Skills from the Recruiter’s Perspective of Meenakshi Sharma (2009) and the research paper entitled “Do Soft Skills Matter? – Implications for Educators Based on Recruiters’ Perspective” of Deepa S and Manisha Seth (2013). The questions in this part are as follows;

- Soft skills are more important than hard skills or other attributes.
- Practitioners are satisfied with the current workforce available for industry/sector.
- There is a gap between the industry requirements and the products of the universities today.
- Adding soft skills in the university curricula will provide better equipped personnel to the industry.
- Staff possessing the required soft skills has higher job performance compared to others.
- Soft skills are crucial to achieve success in the ground passenger service.

Part 3: Identification of 10 most essential Soft Skills for Career Advancement

In this part, the respondents were asked to mark the most 10 needed soft skills out of 70 defined soft skills for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service.

Survey #2 for the second step: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

At this stage, the survey comprised two parts as follows;

Part 1: Personal Information

In this part, the respondents were only asked about their personal identity including their names, working positions and airlines.

Part 2: Pair-wise Comparison Questions

In this part, there were total 45 pair-wise comparison questions, which the researcher went through one by one during the interview period. The questionnaire was developed from the most top ten essential soft skills being defined by the practitioners during the first survey. The interview question guideline is as follows;

- Please compare which soft skill is more important to your opinion for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service

- How much more on a scale 1-9 by defining 1 as equal importance, 3 moderate importance, 5 strong importance, 7 very strong importance and 9 extreme importance?
- What is the reason behind why you do believe that skill “A” is much more important than skill “B”?

Survey #3 for the third step: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The main purpose of this assessment tool is to check/confirm the level of possessed soft skills of first-level airline managers so that the research can further make the conclusion of this research. In order to avoid any objections to participate the test from the respondents and to respect the right of the respondents, the researcher decided to have only one part for this survey, which was the multiple choices 50 questions. No personal information was asked and collected. The questions were developed from 5 standardized Personality Tests (Carter, 2003; Carter et.al., 2003; Sanghi, 2007; Carter 2009; Bryon 2015)

3.5.2 Testing of Research Instrument: Validity Test

The researcher well noted that as a matter of fact that there was quite small scale of data in the qualitative research, it was often criticized that the research results could be incorrect interpreted or could not represent the actual situation. The researcher therefore carefully decided to apply method to ensure high reliability and validity of the data collection and analysis process of this study.

The validity of the survey was determined to ensure that the responses collected through the instruments were valid and consistent. The Verification Strategy, which included the activities e.g. ensuring methodological coherence, sampling sufficiency, ensuring a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection and data analysis etc., was applied in this research in order to ensure high rigor in term of reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In this research, the following phases were performed to ensure the reliability and validity of each survey and assessment tool;

Phase one: The completed first survey form and the template of the second survey was presented to the academicians for contents validity check and to IRB Committee for any suggestion for improvement respectively.

Phase two: The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to find the content validity, clarity and readability via both online survey program “Google Form” and offline channel by distributing the survey to the professional reviewers by email. As a matter of fact that there were 2 survey form and 1 assessment tool in this research study, the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) had to be performed twice as follows;

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines’ and Educators’ Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In this process, the survey was checked by five experts including three high-level airline managers, one university executive, who has roles and responsibilities in designing course curriculum at the university and another Aviation Business lecturer at the university offering bachelor’s programs in the field of Aviation Management. The evaluators were asked to rate and edit questions that were lack of clarity or redundant.

The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the items of the survey based on the score range from -1 to +1.

Congruent = + 1

Questionable = 0

Incongruent = -1

The items that had scores lower than 0.5 were revised. On the other hand, the items that had scores higher than or equal to 0.5 were reserved. Based on the IOC result of the first part of the survey, all evaluators gave the score of 1.0 for the whole part, while in the second part of the survey, the first evaluator gave the score of 0.67, the third evaluator gave the score of 0.83 and the second evaluator, the fourth evaluator and fifth evaluator gave the same score of 1.0. All evaluators gave the score of 1.0 for the question number 3-6, while the average score of the first question was 0.80 and the average score of the second question was 0.60. Hence, none of the questions in part 2 was revised as the average scores of more than 0.50 were granted. Meanwhile, the scores of the third part were slightly different from each other; the first evaluator gave the score of 0.91, the second evaluator gave the score of 0.87, the third evaluator gave the score

of 0.94 and the fourth evaluator and the fifth evaluator gave the score of 1.0. The average score of 1.00 was granted to 55 skills, the average score of 0.80 was granted to 11 soft skills and the average score of 0.60 was granted to 4 soft skills being defined in part 3. Consequently, all defined 70 soft skills was neither removed nor revised. In conclusion, the researcher received the score of 1.00 for the first part, 0.90 for the second part and 0.95 for the third part of the first survey, which made the first survey was a valid and reliable tool to collect data in the first step of the research.

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

In this process, the survey was designed based on the data being received from the first survey. All top 10 soft skills were only plotted into the AHP software being designed by Dr. K.D. Goepel (2017). Hence, no validity check has to be performed in this step as the software was regarded as valid and reliable by itself.

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The final assessment tool being consisted of 50 multiple choices questions, was evaluated for content validity, clarity, and readability with the method of Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) by five experts including two high experienced industry professionals, one native English educators, one educational psychologist, and one educator with PHD in Human Resource Management, who had direct responsibility in the selection, development and promotion process in the organization as well. Evaluators were asked to rate and edit questions and skills that were redundant or lack of clarity. All questions were then revised accordingly.

At last, the list of 50 multiple choices questions were reduced to only 30 multiple choices questions – 3 questions to test each soft skill being identified from the first survey of the high-level airline managers. Based on IOC method, the researcher decided to define the cut-off value to be 0.50 and to reserve only 3 questions with highest average score per each soft skill, as a matter of fact that the total of 50 multiple choices questions would be too much for the personality test part in the whole assessment program for career advancement. Later, total 20 skills with the average score of between 0.20 and 1.00 were removed. Out of these 20 skills, the average score of 0.20 was given

to one question, the average score of 0.40 was given to 3 questions, the average score of 0.60 was given to 12 questions, the score of 0.80 was given to 3 questions and the average score of 1.00 was given to 1 question. Eventually, the researcher received the score between 0.73 and 1.00 for all 30 questions, which made the assessment sheet was a valid and reliable tool to collect data in the third step of the research.

3.6 Data Collection

The researcher has selected to apply both quantitative research methodology and qualitative approach for this study as explained earlier that the topic is very much subjective and sensitive. In order to ease the selection process, the researcher designed to create a list of 70 potential knowledge, skills, and attributes being determined to be of importance based from the extensive review of the literature, the previous survey instruments and also the interviews with industry professionals. The overlapping competencies were eliminated. The whole list can be found in the appendix section.

The survey and the assessment sheet were evaluated for the content validity, clarity and readability with the method of Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) by ten experts including high experienced industry professionals, one native English educator, one educational psychologist, one educator with PHD in Human Resource Management, and educators in Aviation Program and the University Executive, who has the responsibility in the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. The list of the reviewers for each survey and assessment sheet can be found in the appendix section.

The data collection process of this research study was divided into 3 steps as per the research process as follows;

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

There were two respondent groups in this research step, the data collection method was slightly different from each other. For the practitioners, in order to identify the most 10 essential Soft Skills for each group of airlines, data was mainly collected through the survey method. In addition, the researcher also used the interview method

besides distributing the survey in the fillable pdf form to high-level managers from all airline groups as following; Thai Carriers, Far East Asia Carriers, South East Asia Carriers, South Asia Carriers, Middle East Carriers, African Carriers, Russian Carriers, European Carriers and others etc. The interview process was conducted personally with some respondents, who have the main responsibility of making decisions for staff promotion. The survey link was available for 2 weeks, and e-mail reminders were sent to non-respondents at 3- to 5-day intervals. At last total 61 valid responses were received.

In order to analyse, compare and find the gaps between the view and perception of the practitioners and the educators for further research study, the similar survey form was sent by e-mails and postage to all universities, delivering the Aviation related courses. The questionnaires could be completed using either online and offline method. Follow-up telephone calls were consequently made to enhance the rate of response. The online survey was available for almost 8 weeks.

Ultimately, the list of 70 potential knowledge, skills, and attitudes was reduced to 10 competencies applicable across the areas of Ground Passenger Service Handling. The list of 10 competencies was developed only from the results of the airliners with high-level management position. It was decided not to include the result of the educators in the second survey as the researcher has intended to identify the essential Soft Skills being needed by the practitioners in this research study. In addition, the researcher also would like to study on the gaps between identified essential soft skills by the practitioners and the educators for further conclusion of the research study.

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

In this step, the survey was designed based on Analytic Hierarchy Process software (EVM multiple inputs) Version 11.10.2017 of Dr. K.D. Goepel. As a matter of fact that AHP was a method to support multi-criteria decision making, AHP derives ratio scales from paired comparisons of criteria and allows for some small inconsistencies in judgements. Hence, the researcher admitted that it was challenging for the respondents to complete the survey by themselves as the pair-wise comparison questions are quite complex. The researcher therefore decided to use the semi-structure interview method and in-depth interview method to ensure the quality data collection.

The interview process began from sending emails and made phone calls to prospective respondents and asking their willingness to participate in the study. Almost 70 people were contacted including both familiar and unfamiliar prospective interviewees. Most of them had shown their strong interest in contributing to this research study. Then, the researcher either visited the participants in their office or called them as per initial appointment made in order to facilitate through a series of pair-wise comparisons to complete the survey.

Prior to making interviews, the participants were asked consent to participate in this research study. They were explained on the purpose of the research study, the interview process and the definition or explanation of each terminology as per table 3.2.

Table 3.2 The definition of each soft skill

No.	Skills	Definition
1	work under pressure and stress	Dealing with constraints which are often outside of your control - these might be resource or time constraints, the difficulty of the task or having insufficient knowledge required to complete the task, or unforeseen changes or problems.
2	teamwork/ collaboration	Being constructive, performing your role, listening to colleagues and encouraging them
3	attitude (positive)	the explanation of the actions of a person owing to how that person feels about something, for example, consciously held beliefs or opinions and emotional feelings
4	problem solving skills	Thinking things through in a logical way in order to determine key issues, often also including creative thinking
5	communication	Listening to other people and clearly getting your point across orally, in writing and via electronic means, in a manner appropriate to the audience.

Table 3.2 The definition of each soft skill (cont.)

No.	Skills	Definition
6	decision making skills	Making decisions involves choice between two or more alternatives. It requires knowledge about available alternatives, the consequences of available alternatives, ability to evaluate the consequences of available alternatives and a well-ordered and stable set of preferences.
7	ability and willingness to learn	Cheerfully consenting or readiness to know new things and to improve yourself. Willingness to learn means you are a person who wants to be more qualified and wants to be up to date with changes and tendencies in your professional area. You have desire and passion for improving your professional skills and competencies
8	emotionally stable/ intelligence	The absence of anxiety, depression, anger, worry, and insecurity among individuals
9	interpersonal skills (ability to get along with others)	Relating well to others and establishing good working relationships
10	negotiation skills	A process where two [or more] parties with differences which they need to resolve are trying to reach an agreement through exploring for options and exchanging offers

During the interview, the participants were asked to compare the importance of the two soft skills in from the left and right table in order to identify which of the soft skill is more important for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service than the other and how much better the selected one is more important compared to the other. At the end of the interview, the participants were given 5-10 minutes to provide the

additional feedback on the researcher' interpretations of their responses. So, the researcher spent around 15-45 minutes to interview each participant depending on their answers whether they had to be re-adjusted as per software recommendation in order to finalize the results. The duration of this data collection process was lasted almost 4 weeks.

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In this step, the final survey in form of the assessment sheet was designed and developed based on the results of the first survey from the practitioners. The survey was distributed to first-level airline managers by e-mails and could be completed using online and offline methods. Follow-up telephone calls were consequently made to enhance the rate of response and the survey link was available online for almost 8 weeks. In this step, the data was being collected anonymously but the respondents could also choose to identify who they were on the survey so that the researcher would be able to contact later for further data clarification. Nonetheless, the name or anything that would identify the participants would not be used in the published report of the study. The data would be kept securely and would be assessed only by the researcher for data analysis, after which the data would be diminished. Finally, a total of 155 valid responses were returned.

3.7 Data Analysis

Bryman & Bell (2011) had mentioned that one of the main challenges with the qualitative research was to analyse a large amount of database e.g. notes and interview transcripts etc. Maxwell (2013) highlighted the above statement and suggested that an initial step in qualitative analysis was listen to audio records of interviews and to prepare transcripts and write notes for developing ideas about the categories and their relationships. In order to achieve the research study objectives, several data analysis methods were applied as follows;

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The result of this step was analysed using several statistical methods including descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations to rank the order of importance of the skills in the first few steps.

The constant comparison method was also applied to analyse the data being collected in this step through both survey form and interviews with some participants. The researcher compared the data within a single interview, the data within the same group and the data between different group in order to understand and find the gap between the perception of each group.

In addition, to test whether perception means of practitioners and educators are significantly different, Chi-square test was as well employed given the nominal level of perception measurement.

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), being introduced by Thomas L. Saaty (1980) was the technique being commonly used in multi criteria decision making. The advantage of using this technique was to conduct the subjective evaluation situation on the important components or variables in the decision-making process. AHP was developed based on three principles which were the principle of constructing hierarchy, the principle of developing priority and the principle of logical consistency (Rafikul, 2004).

In addition, in Saaty's book "The Analytical Hierarchy Process", he as well developed the hierarchy for the selection of academic staff position and promotion. This hierarchy was developed to make the basic appraisal on the selection process based on two main criteria, which were teaching and research (Saaty, 1980). Nonetheless, the criteria became more complicated, when it came to the higher level of promotion. Apart from this purpose, it was also mentioned that the model can also be used to evaluate and assess the qualified candidates. The model built was based on three components with related sub criteria.

Schoemaker and Waid (1982) concluded that the decision-making-process of AHP was the most effective and credible tool which produced the most accurate

results. With the help of AHP, the decision makers could assign a relative weight to each factor through pair-wise comparison. The modelling process of AHP was supported by four axioms:

Axiom 1: Reciprocal condition: Comparisons can be made and the strength of one's preferences can be stated. The intensity of these preferences must satisfy the reciprocal condition: If X is n times preferred to Y, then Y is $1/n$ times preferred to X.

Axiom 2: Homogeneity: The preferences are represented in the form of bounded scale. This axiom deals with the idea that comparisons are meaningful only if the criteria or alternatives are comparable

Axiom 3: Independence: The relative importance of a criterion at any level of the hierarchy is independent of the criteria/alternatives included at the lower level.

Axiom 4: Expectation: For the purpose of making a decision, the hierarchic structure is assumed to be complete. (Laosirihongthong, Punnakitikashem & Adebajo, 2013)

In this research step, the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique, was used to identify and prioritize the ten soft skills, which were identified in the first research step that they were essential for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service as this technique is an approach for quantifying an idea, feeling and emotion by assigning a number of scale to prioritize the decision alternatives that exist in a problem under consideration (Taha, 1997). The general procedure of AHP could be described as follows;

1. The problem structures were developed hierarchically in a top-down approach (Saaty, 1980). In this research step, the objective of the problem was determined and the criteria in determining the objective of the problem was also identified. The objective and criteria were stated in Figure 11.
2. Eliciting judgment in paired comparisons was performed. 9-point ratio scale as shown in Table 2 was as well identified.

3. The priority synthesis involving the process of prioritizing every criterion in the problem was performed. In this step, the judgements were done by weighting the elements.

Table 3.3 The fundamental 9-point ratio scale (K.D. Goepel)

Intensity of importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two elements contribute equally to the objective
3	Moderate importance	Experience and judgment slightly favor one element over another
5	Strong Importance	Experience and judgment strongly favor one element over another
7	Very strong importance	One element is favored very strongly over another, its dominance is demonstrated in practice
9	Extreme importance	The evidence favoring one element over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation
2,4,6,8 can be used to express intermediate values		

This research step aimed to identify the importance of each soft skill. Based on the results from the first research survey with high-level airline managers, the problem structure presented in Figure 11 was then developed.

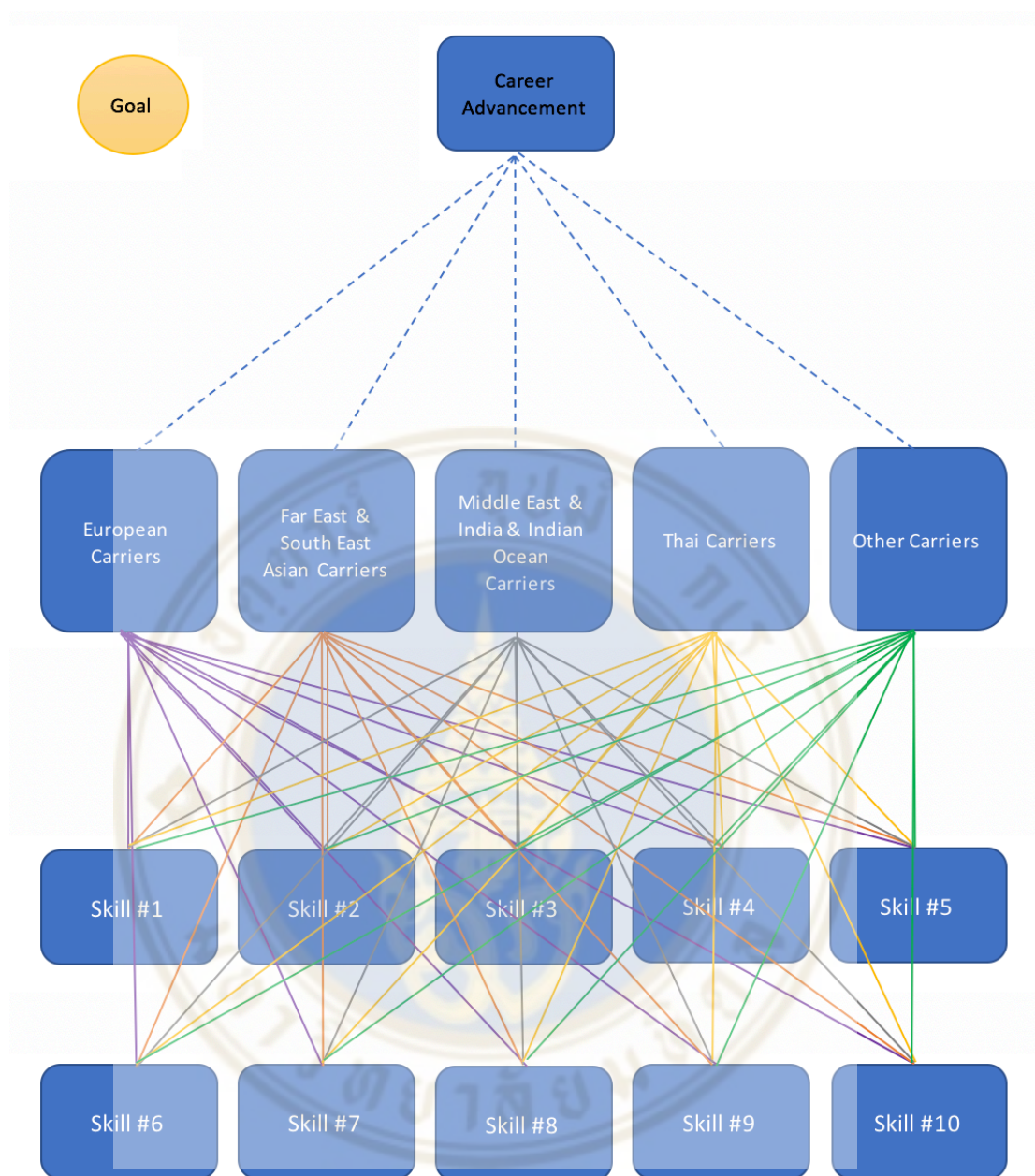


Figure 3.5 AHP Model for Multi-criteria Decision Making for Career Advancement

Eventually, in order to ensure to handle all the data and aid the process, the results of this step was analysed using Analytic Hierarchy Process Software of Dr. K.D. Goepel (2017).

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In this step, the result was analysed using several statistical methods including descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations. In addition, the researcher as well used Microsoft Excel to keep the detailed score of each respondent. With the excel sheet, the researcher could easily manage the label and categorize the score to make sure it is place under the right categories of possessed skills.



CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

After reviewing the previous chapter, where the in-depth analysis undertaken for this study was explained, this chapter will present the findings of the study and the results based upon the data derived from the surveys. With the data analysis already outlined, the most top ten essential soft skills for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service to the perceptions of both airlines and educators were identified, leading to the construction of the soft-skill assessment tool development to reflect the level of possessed soft skills by the entry-level airline managers. The descriptive statistics and findings of the interviews being conducted with practitioners will as well be provided. At last, the study's results whilst aiming to respond to the research questions will be reported.

The purposes of this research study were to investigate 1) the perceptions of airlines and educators towards the importance of soft skills for career advancement in ground passenger service; 2) which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for successful career advancement in ground passenger service in the perceptions of airlines and educators; 3) the discrepancies between the perceptions of the two main stakeholders; 4) the ranking of each essential soft skills of each airline group; 5) the discrepancies between the perceptions of each airline group based on their needs and 6) an assessment tool in form of the Personality Test to assess the possessed skills of the candidates for career advancement. In order to reach these research purposes the in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were employed.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

This research applied in-depth interview, self-administered questionnaires via both online and offline method and the assessment test, to collect data from 3 groups

of key respondents which are the high-level airline managers, the educators in Aviation Program and the entry-level airline managers.

As mentioned earlier that the data collection process in this study was divided into 3 steps, the different respondent groups to each research step were identified in advance as follows;

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In this step, the data being obtained from 61 high-level airline managers and 56 educators from 17 universities through both online and offline survey form were used for analysis. Overview details of respondents are as follows;

4.1.1 High-level airline managers

Respondents include 61 high-level airline managers with minimum of three-year-long experience in Aviation Business including both Thai (81.97%) and Foreign Expatriate Management (18.03%) working at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport participated in this research study. Particularly, all of them work in the operations department of the airlines.

In order to ease the data analysis process and to analyse the difference between perceptions of airlines in each airline group, the results of the respondents were arranged into 5 groups based on their country of origin as follows; Thai Carriers, Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers, Far East & South East Asia Carriers, European Carriers and Other Carriers.

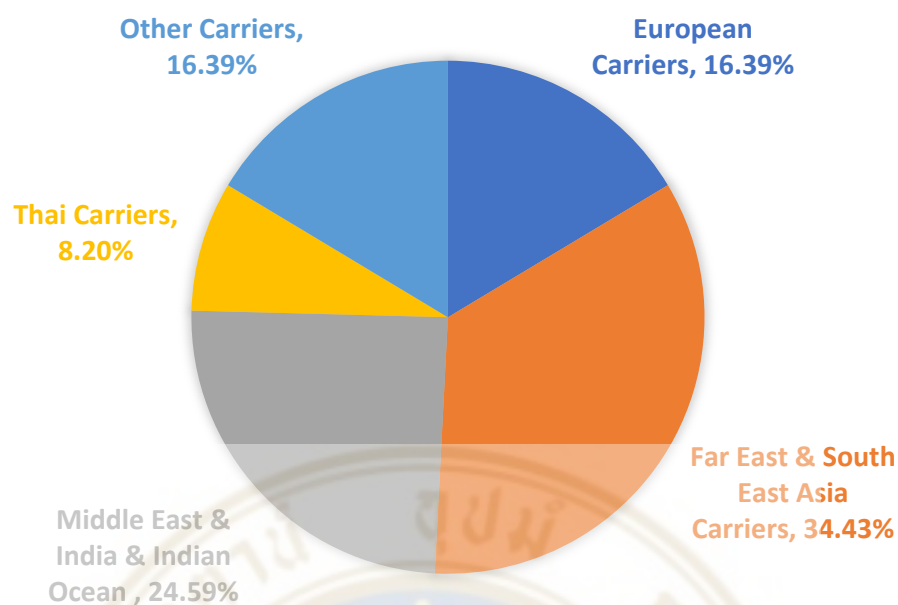


Figure 4.1 The distribution of respondents participating the first survey

Figure 4.1 displayed the distribution of respondents by the country of their airline origins. The number of the respondents was as follows: Thai Carriers (5 person), Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers (15 person), Far East & South East Asia Carriers (21 person), European Carriers (10 person) and Other Carriers (10 person).

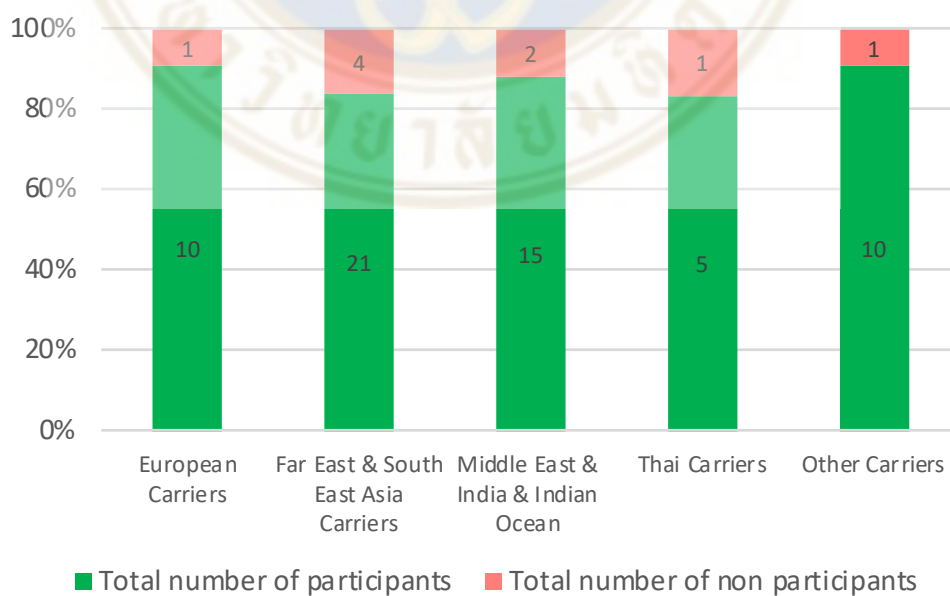


Figure 4.2 the sample size of each airline group participating the first survey.

Figure 4.2 displays the proportion of the respondents of each airline group participating the first survey. The number of the respondents was as follows: 10 out of 11 European Carriers (90.91%), 21 out of 25 Far East & South East Asia Carriers (84.00%), 15 out of 17 Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers (88.24%), 5 out of 6 Thai Carriers (83.33%), and 10 out of 11 Other Carriers (90.91%).

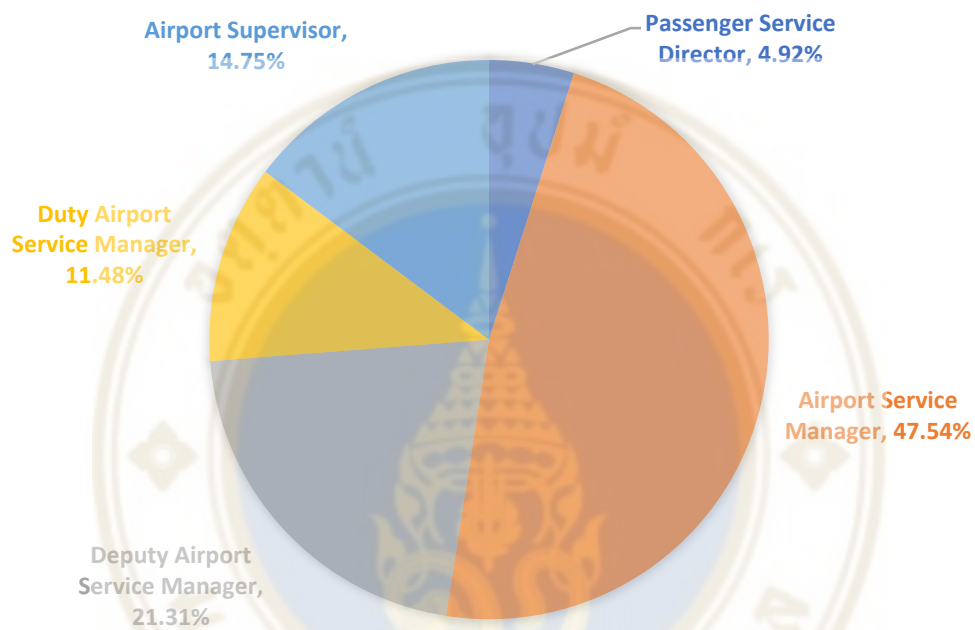


Figure 4.3 The distribution of the respondents by their working positions

Figure 4.3 presented that most of the participants (52.46%) were either Airport Service Managers or Passenger Service Director, followed by Deputy Airport Service Manager (21.31%). 11.48% of the respondents were Duty Airport Service Manager and another 14.75% of the respondents were Airport Supervisor.

Due to time constraint, the final numbers of participants was limited to 61 people, which was still sufficient as based on using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the sample size of 60 was sufficient for this research study.

4.1.2 Educators in Aviation Program

The incomplete surveys and those completed by persons, who are not currently related to the Aviation program were eliminated, leaving 56 valid responses surveys from 17 universities, which yielded a university response rate of 73.91%. This was felt to be an adequate sample size, as similar studies had response rates ranging from 328 responses equalling 14.02% of the sample (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004) to 56 responses equalling 41.2% of the sample (Wilson et al., 2000).

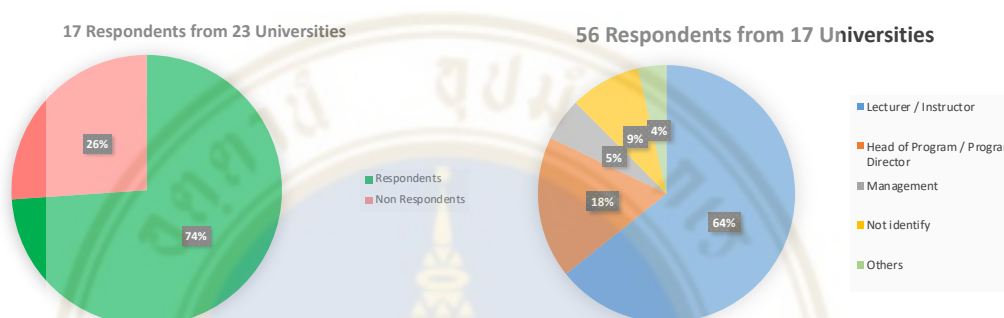


Figure 4.4 and 4.5 The percentage number of respondents and the distribution of the respondents by their working positions

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

In this step, the data being obtained from 61 high-level airline managers through AHP model was used for analysis. The overview details of respondent are as follows;

4.1.3 High-level airline managers

Participants include 61 high-level airline managers with minimum of three-year-long experience in Aviation Business including both Thai (81.97%) and Foreign Expatriate Management (18.03%) working at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport participated in this research study. Particularly, all of them work in the operations department of the airlines.

In order to ease the data analysis process and to analyse the difference between perceptions of airliners in each airline group, the researcher decided to re-arrange the airline group being defined in the first survey. Consequently, the number of airlines in each airline group was slightly different. The results of the respondents in the

second survey were arranged into 5 groups based on their country of origin as follows; Thai Carriers, Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers, Far East & South East Asia Carriers, European Carriers and Other Carriers.

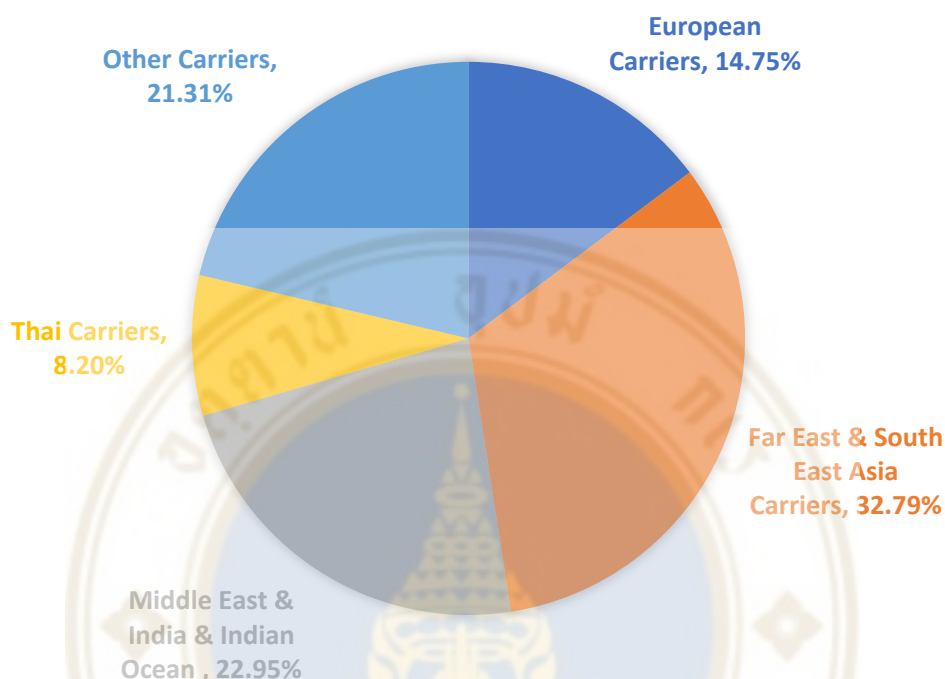


Figure 4.6 The distribution of respondents participating the second survey

Figure 4.6 displayed the distribution of respondents by the country of their airline origins. The number of the respondents was as follows: Thai Carriers (5 person), Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers (14 person), Far East & South East Asia Carriers (20 person), European Carriers (9 person) and Other Carriers (13 person).

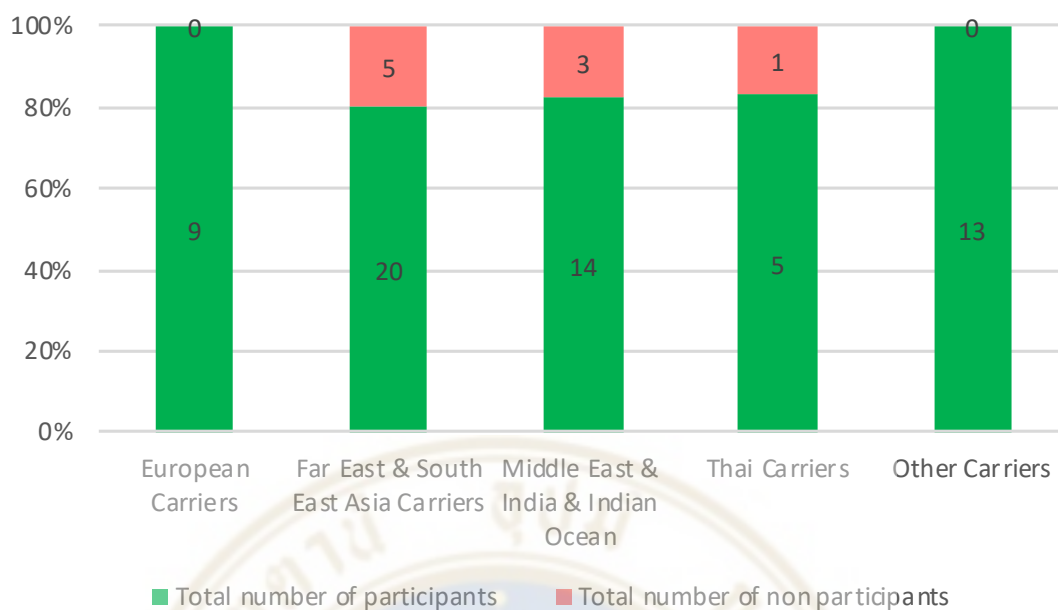


Figure 4.7 the sample size of each airline group participating the second survey.

Figure 4.7 displayed the proportion of the respondents of each airline group participating the first survey. The number of the respondents was as follows: 9 out of 9 European Carriers (100%), 20 out of 25 Far East & South East Asia Carriers (80.00%), 14 out of 17 Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers (82.35%), 5 out of 6 Thai Carriers (83.33%), and 10 out of 11 Other Carriers (100%).

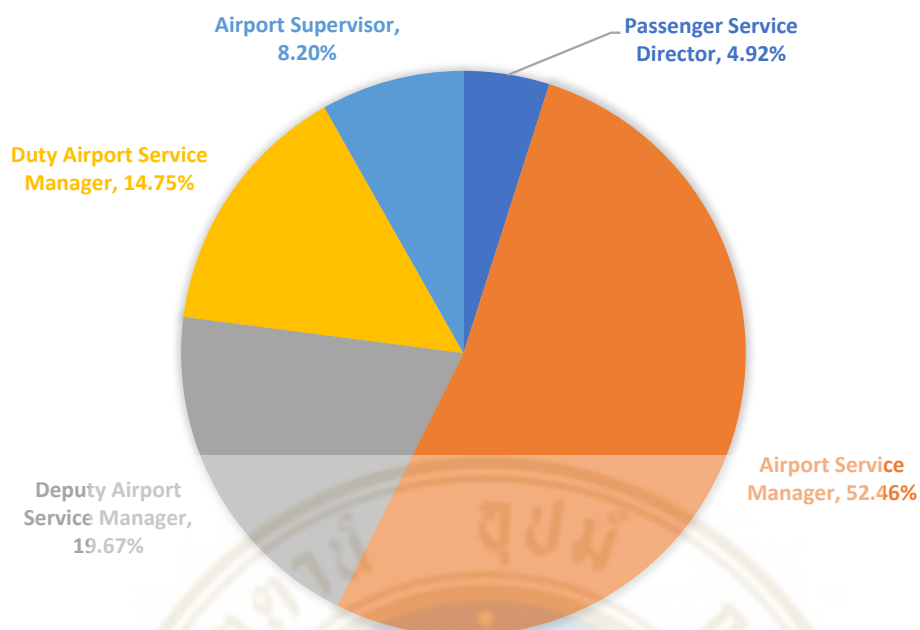


Figure 4.8 The distribution of the respondents by their working positions

Figure 4.8 presented that most of the participants (57.38%) were either Airport Service Managers or Passenger Service Director, followed by Deputy Airport Service Manager (19.67%). 14.75% of the respondents were Duty Airport Service Manager and another 8.20% of the respondents were Airport Supervisor.

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

In this step, the data being obtained from 155 entry-level airline managers through both online and offline test was used for analysis. The detail of the respondents is as follows;

4.1.4 Entry-level airline managers

Participants include 155 entry-level airline managers working in the Passenger Service Department at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

4.2 Descriptive analysis

The data collection process in this study was divided into 3 steps, the result of each step was carefully analysed prior to start of the next step as follows;

Step 1: Comparative Studies of Airlines' and Educators' Perceptions Towards Soft Skills Essential for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The data analysis comprised of 3 main sections as follows;

- (1) General Perceptions towards Soft Skills
- (2) The top ten Soft Skills in the perception of airlines and educators
- (3) The discrepancy among perceptions of the airlines and educators

Step 2: Study on Ranking Essential Soft Skills by Airline Groups

The data analysis comprised of 5 main sections as follows;

- (4) The ranking of top ten Soft Skills in the perception of each airline group
- (5) The comparison between the top ten Soft Skills being ranked based on popularity method in the first survey and the consolidated top ten Soft Skills based on pairwise comparison method through AHP model in the second survey
- (6) The discrepancy among perceptions of each airline group
- (7) The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of Thai Carriers
- (8) The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of top 5 Skytrax Carriers

Step 3: Essential Soft-Skill Assessment Tool Development to Identify Potential Candidates for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Service

The data analysis comprised of 3 main sections as follows;

- (9) General Assessment Score
- (10) The level of possessed top ten Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers

- (11) The discrepancy among possessed Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers and the expectation and needs of high-level managers

4.2.1 General Perceptions towards Soft Skills

Both respondent groups agreed that soft skills were essential for career success in ground passenger service. Detailed results of the six questions were presented in figure 9 below. Most practitioners (90%) and educators (93%) agreed that adding soft skills into the university curriculum would provide better equipped personnel for the industry and empower them for their career advancement in ground passenger service. In addition, most practitioners (72%) and educators (86%) agreed that there was a gap between the industry requirements and the quality of the university graduates today. Only 71% of the educators agreed that soft skills were more important than other attributes e.g. technical skills, knowledge whereas 84% of the practitioners thought that they were crucial. However, 74% of the educators believed that practitioners were satisfied with the current workforce while only 20% of the practitioners mentioned that they were satisfied. This result indicated the discrepancy among the two parties.

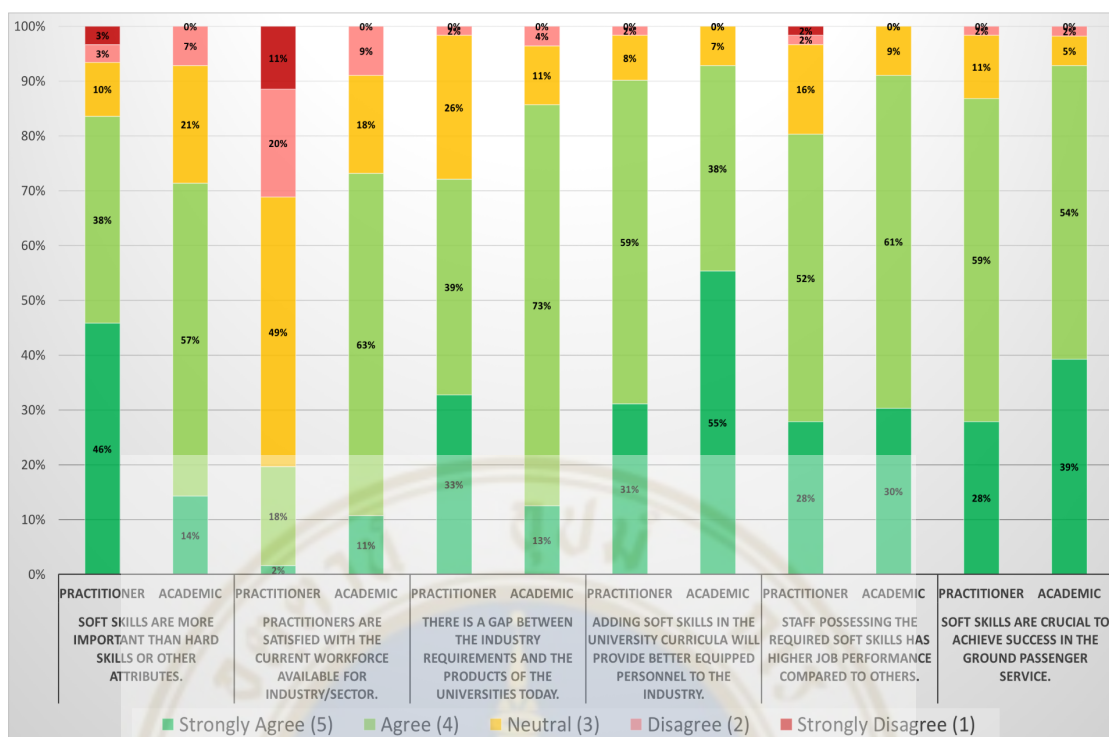


Figure 4.9 The result comparisons between the perception of soft skills between practitioners and educators.

4.2.2 The top ten Soft Skills in the perception of airlines and educators

The results showed that the practitioners viewed “being able to work under pressure and under stress” as the most important soft skill having 57% of respondents strongly agreed upon. “Teamwork/collaboration” and “positive attitude” were equally viewed as second attributes with 54% of respondents choosing the strongly agree option. The other seven essential soft skills were “problem solving skills”, “communication skills”, “decision making skills”, “ability and willingness to learn”, “emotionally stable/intelligence”, “inter-personal skills” and “negotiation skills”.

Practitioner (61)	European Carriers (10)	Far East & South East Asia Carriers (21)	Middle East & India & Indian Ocean (15)	Thai Carriers (5)	Other Carriers (10)
work under pressure and stress (57%)	punctuality (50%)	teamwork / collaboration (62%)	problem solving skills (80%)	interpersonal Skills (80%)	work under pressure and stress (80%)
teamwork / collaboration (54%)	decision making skill (50%)	ability and willingness to learn (62%)	communication (60%)	teamwork / collaboration (80%)	positive attitude (70%)
positive attitude (54%)	teamwork / collaboration (50%)	work under pressure and stress (57%)	teamwork / collaboration (53%)	positive attitude (80%)	ability and willingness to learn (60%)
problem solving skills (51%)	positive attitude (50%)	positive attitude (48%)	positive attitude (47%)	work under pressure and stress (80%)	decision making skill (60%)
communication (43%)	work under pressure and stress (50%)	emotionally stable (43%)	work under pressure and stress (40%)	problem solving skills (60%)	negotiation skills (50%)
ability and willingness to learn (43%)	problem solving skills (40%)	problem solving skills (38%)	ethics & integrity (40%)	communication (60%)	problem solving skills (40%)
decision making skill (41%)	leadership skills (40%)	decision making skill (33%)	common sense (33%)	discipline (40%)	communication (30%)
emotionally stable (31%)	sense of responsibility (40%)	sense of responsibility (33%)	decision making skill (33%)	reliability (40%)	planning and organizing (30%)
interpersonal Skills (31%)	communication (40%)	communication (33%)	customer relation (33%)	sense of responsibility (40%)	enthusiasm (30%)
negotiation skills (28%)	interpersonal Skills (40%)	customer relation (33%)	flexibility (33%)	decision making skill (40%)	anger management skills (30%)
				negotiation skills (40%)	teamwork / collaboration (30%)
				ability and willingness to learn (40%)	emotionally stable (30%)
					friendliness (30%)

Figure 4.10 Top 10 most essential soft skills for career advancement from the perception of each airline group (popularity method)

Figure 4.10 showed many commonalities in the top 10 rankings of soft skills being identified by each airline group. Specifically, “being able to work under pressure and stress” and “positive attitude” were always among the top 5 for all airline groups. The differences in rankings among different airline groups could be due to the different natures of the work environments in which each type of airline supervisor was expected to perform, and the different types of customer demands they had to meet. For instance, punctuality and leadership skills were very crucial skills to the perceptions of European Carriers Managers while they were not ranked in the top 10 essential soft skills for carriers from other regions.

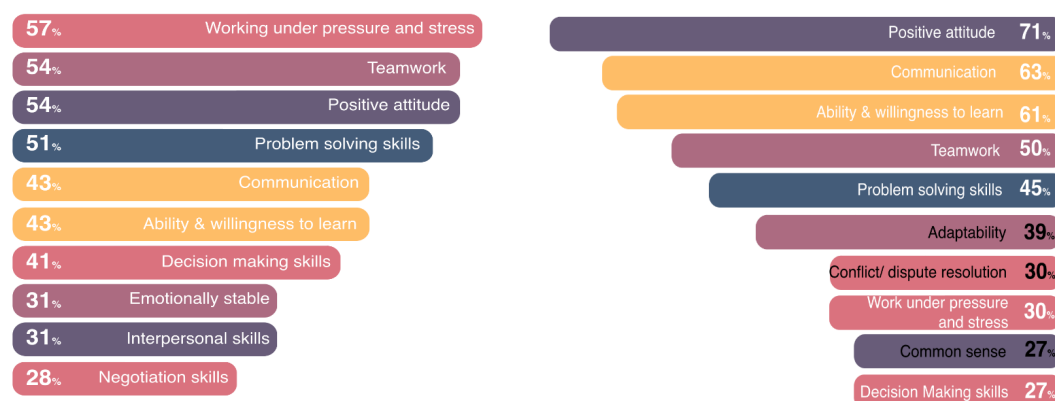


Figure 4.11 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of the practitioners. (left) The consolidated most top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of the educators. (right)

Based on figure 4.11 (left), the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of the practitioners were as follows: “being able to work under pressure and stress”, “teamwork”, “positive attitude”, “problem solving skills”, “communication skills”, “decision making skills”, “ability and willingness to learn”, “emotionally stable”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills”.

Figure 4.11 (right) presented the top 10 essential soft skills to the perceptions of educators. “Positive attitude” was viewed as the most important soft skill by educators with 71% strongly agreed upon. This was followed by “communication skills” and “ability and willingness to learn” with 63% and 61% educators agreed upon respectively. The other seven soft skills were “teamwork” and “problem solving skills”, “adaptability skills”, “conflict/ dispute resolutions”, and “being able to work under pressure and stress”, “common sense” and “decision making skills”.

Five out of 70 soft skills were not selected by any group of respondents. They were “enhancing socialization skills”, “entrepreneurship skills”, “personal effectiveness/ mastery”, “pose and composure” and “tactfulness skills”.

4.2.3 The discrepancy among perceptions of the airliners and educators

The study indicated that “adaptability”, “conflict/dispute resolution skills” and “common sense” were among the top ten skills by educators but the airliners thought

otherwise. On the other hand, table 1 presented that “emotionally stable”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills” which were viewed as the top ten list by airliners, but the educators had different views.

Table 4.1 Comparison between the airliners’ and educators’ perceptions of whether each certain soft skill was required for career advancement of ground passenger handling jobs

Soft skills required for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Handling	Opinions	Type		
		Airliners	Educators	Total
“ability and willingness to learn”	Not	35	22	57
	Important	57.4%	39.3%	48.7%
	Important	26	34	60
		42.6%	60.7%	51.3%
	Chi-square = 3.825, p = 0.050			
“adaptability”	Not	53	34	87
	Important	86.9%	60.7%	74.4%
	Important	8	22	30
		13.1%	39.3%	25.6%
	Chi-square = 10.488, p = 0.001			
“assertiveness”	Not	61	49	110
	Important	100%	87.5%	94.0%
	Important	0	7	7
		0.0%	12.5%	6.0%
	Chi-square = 8.110, p = 0.004			
“communication”	Not	35	21	56
	Important	57.4%	37.5%	47.9%
	Important	26	35	61
		42.6%	62.5%	52.1%
	Chi-square = 4.623, p = 0.032			

Table 4.1 Comparison between the airlines' and educators' perceptions of whether each certain soft skill was required for career advancement of ground passenger handling jobs (cont.)

Soft skills required for Career Advancement in Ground Passenger Handling	Opinions	Type		
		Airlines	Educators	Total
“conflict/dispute resolution skills”	Not Important	52	39	91
		85.2%	69.6%	77.8%
	Important	9	17	26
		14.8%	30.4%	22.2%
	Chi-square = 4.113, p = 0.043			
“planning and organizing”	Not Important	45	52	97
		73.8%	92.9%	82.9%
	Important	16	4	20
		26.2%	7.1%	17.1%
	Chi-square = 7.505, p = 0.006			
“work under pressure and stress”	Not Important	26	39	65
		42.6%	69.6%	55.6%
	Important	35	17	52
		57.4%	30.4%	44.4%
	Chi-square = 8.633, p = 0.003			

The comparison between airlines' and educators' perceptions of which soft skills were required for career advancement of ground passenger handling jobs was shown in Figure 5. Results show that there are significantly difference in perception of airlines and education in seven skills of the soft skills ($\chi^2 2 = 3.825 - 10.488$, $P < 0.05$). They were (1) ability and willingness to learn, (2) adaptability, (6) assertiveness, (11) communication, (13) conflict/dispute resolution skills, (48) planning and organizing and (70) work under pressure and stress. Specifically, both parties agreed that four soft skills were not necessary for advancement in ground passenger service career; namely (2) adaptability, (6) assertiveness, (13) conflict/dispute resolution skills, and (48)

planning and organizing. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant discrepancy in viewing three soft skills. Unlike educators, airliners viewed that (1) ability and willingness to learn and (11) communication were not required traits to be successful while (70) work under pressure and stress was viewed as important.

4.2.4 The ranking of top ten Soft Skills in the perception of each airline group

In the previous research step, the focus has continuously been on comparative studies of airliners' and educators' perceptions towards soft skills essential for career advancement in order to ascertain the discrepancy between the perceptions of both major stakeholders and to investigate which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for success. The data collection was done through both online and offline survey and the ranking of each essential soft skill was performed based on the popularity method.

In the second research step, it was aimed to investigate the ranking of each soft skill especially the ranking of each airline group so that the university educators could understand the requirements of the practitioners better and could equip their students with the right skills.

In order to handle and quantify the subjective input being received from the high-level airline managers during the in-depth interview, the multi-criteria decision making approach namely AHP (Analytic hierarchy process) was brought in.

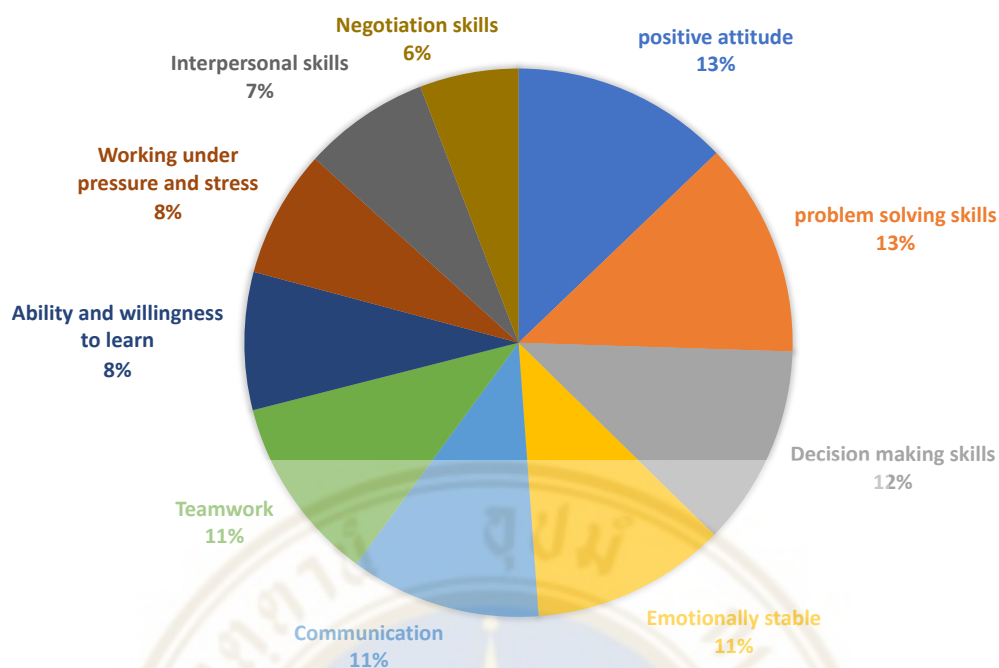


Figure 4.12 The consolidated top 10 most essential soft skills for career advancement based on data from AHP Model

As a result of data being derived from AHP model by Dr. Klaus D. Goepel (2017), the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of the practitioners were as follows: “positive attitude”, “problem solving skills”, “decision making skills”, “emotionally stable”, “communication”, “teamwork”, “ability and willingness to learn”, “working under pressure and stress”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills”.

Consolidated Data

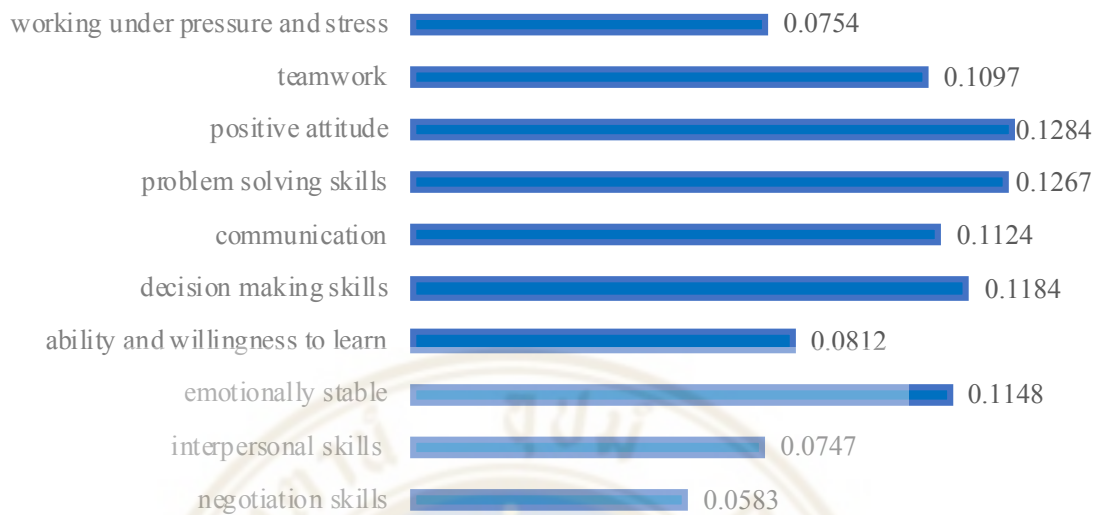


Figure 4.13 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of 61 high-level airliner managers

Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, the results showed that the practitioners viewed “positive attitude” as the most important soft skill having an AHP score of 12.84%. “problem solving skills” and “decision making skills” were viewed as second and third attributes with an AHP score of 12.67% and 11.84% respectively. Meanwhile, “working under pressure and stress”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills” were perceived as the least important soft skill having an AHP score of 7.54%, 7.47% and 5.83% respectively.

European Carriers

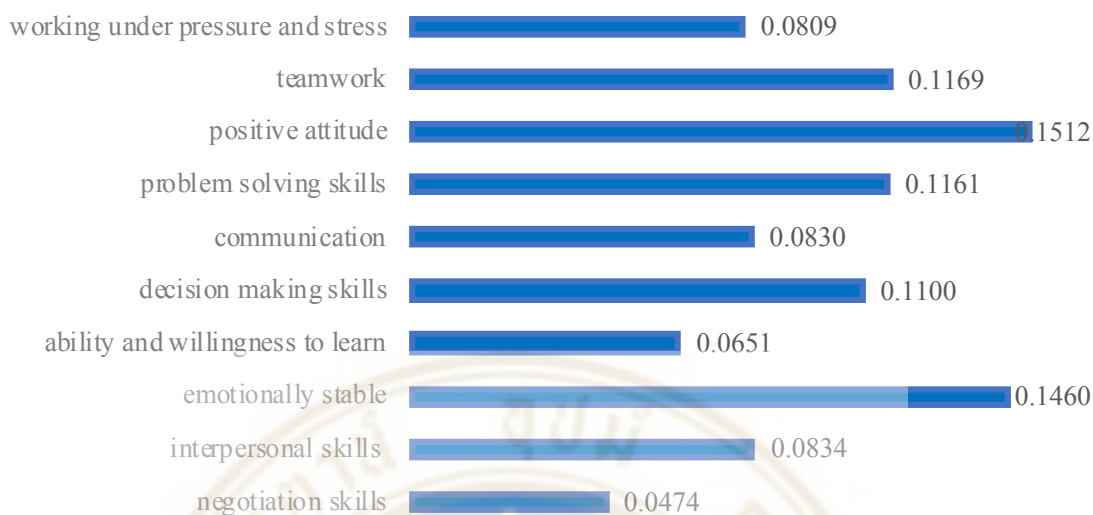


Figure 4.14 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level European Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.14 presented the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level European Carrier airline managers. All high-level airline managers in this group participated in the survey yielding the group response rate of 100%. The group consensus results were 68.80%.

Based on the results in figure 4.14, it was clearly shown that “positive attitude” (0.1512) and “emotionally stable” (0.1460) were perceived most important soft skills compared to others, whereas “negotiation skills” (0.0474) was perceived least important soft skill.

One of the Expatriate European airline station managers mentioned that all airline managers had to comply to the rules and regulations being defined by the airlines. Currently, even the tolerant rate was predefined by the airlines. The first-entry level managers were not allowed to grant any extra benefits to the passengers. Consequently, “negotiation skills” was not essential in comparison to the other 9 soft skills.

Far East & South East Asian Carriers

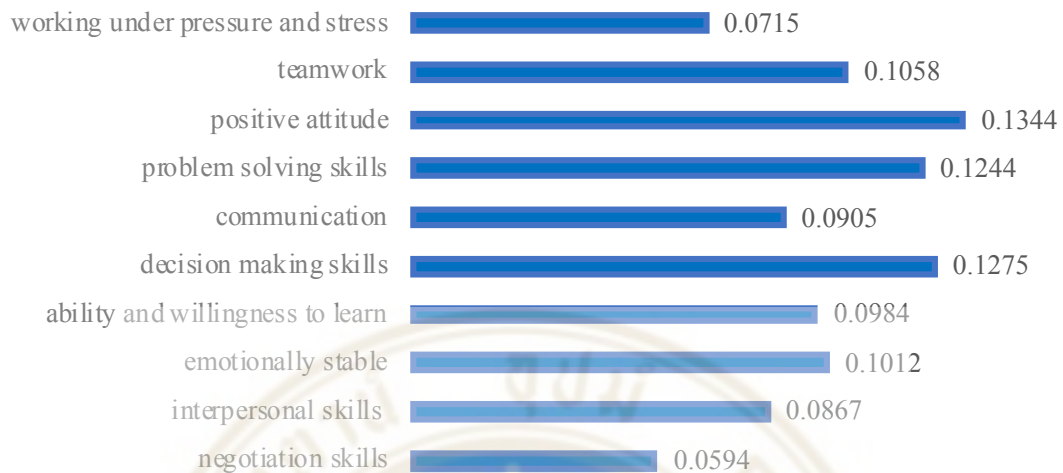


Figure 4.15 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Far East & South East Asian Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.15 presented the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Far East & South East Asian Carrier airline managers. In this airline group, there were 20 respondents out of 25 yielding the group response rate of 80%. The group consensus results were 70.60%.

Based on the results being displayed in figure 4.15, the score range was between 0.0594 and 0.1344. “positive attitude” (0.1344), “decision making skills” (0.1275) and “problem solving skills” (0.1244) were perceived to be the top three most essential soft skills, whereas “negotiation skills” (0.0594) was perceived least important soft skill similar to the feedback of the European Carrier group.

Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers

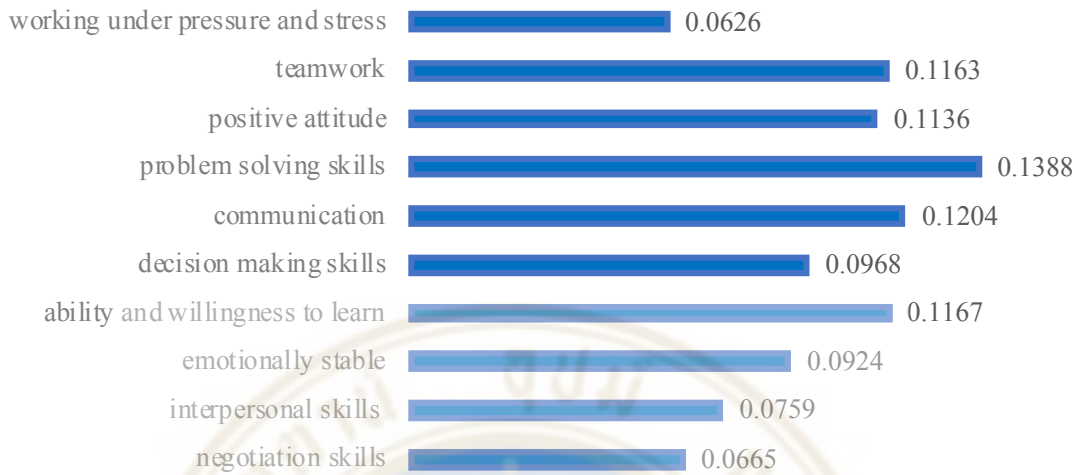


Figure 4.16: The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.16 presented the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carrier airline managers. In this airline group, there were 14 respondents out of 17 yielding the group response rate of 82.35%. The group consensus results were 68.70%, which was the lowest result compared to other airline groups. In addition, it was also shown in the result that the gap between the most essential soft skill and the least essential soft skill was very narrow compared to the result of other groups. Consequently, not many significant signals were discovered.

Based on the results being displayed in figure 4.16, the score range was between 0.0626 and 0.1388. “problem solving skills” (0.1388) was perceived to be the most essential soft skill compared to others, whereas “working under pressure and stress” (0.0626) was perceived least important soft skill.

Thai Carriers

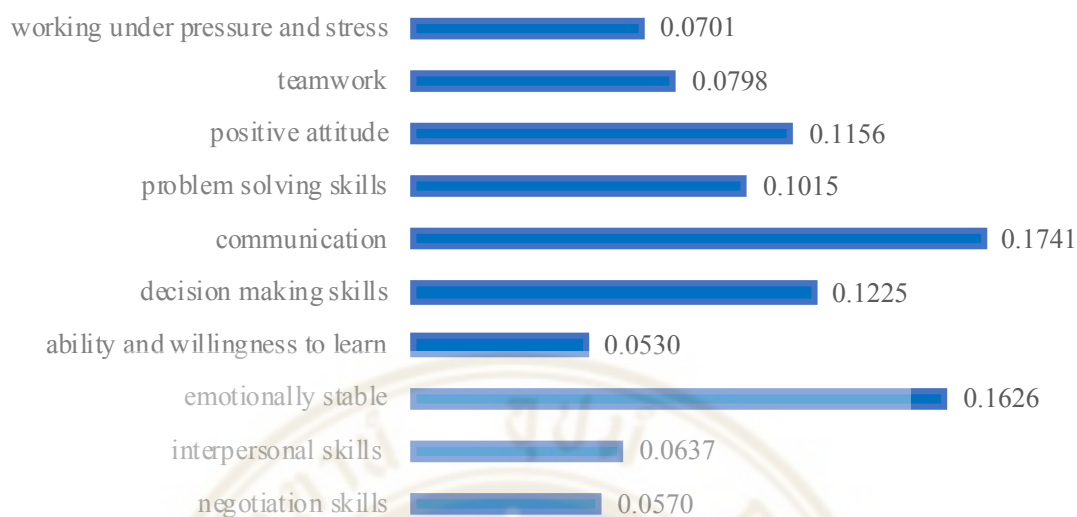


Figure 4.17 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Thai Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.17 presented the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Thai Carrier airline managers. In this airline group, there were 5 respondents out of 6 yielding the group response rate of 83.33%. The group consensus results were 71.40%.

Based on the results being displayed in figure 4.17, the score range was between 0.0570 and 0.1741. The results in figure 18 clearly showed that “communication” (0.1741) and “emotionally stable” (0.1626) were perceived the most important skills for entry-level managers of Thai Carriers.

The opinion of one of the Director of Ground Service Departments was that the passenger service job was more challenging compared to the past. One of the main reasons was the emergence of low-cost carriers attracting more passengers than ever before. Consequently, the way people thought of air travel was totally and unavoidably changed. The passengers had more complex requirements, whereas airlines had more safety and security related regulations and restrictions. Airline staff, therefore, needed specific sets of skills to successfully perform their jobs.

She pointed out that the front line staff at all levels had to be very keen and professional on “communication” in order to ensure customer satisfaction while meeting

all aviation safety and security rules and regulation. At the same time, “emotionally stable” was also very much vital for the individual staff in order to be able to control themselves and deliver the service as per the standard operating procedures.

Another high-level Thai Carrier airline manager expressed a similar view. He commented that one of the most challenging situations faced while working at the check-in area was the difficulty in dealing with misbehaving passengers. One of the most important criteria for staff promotion process of his airline company was the level of the communication as he personally believed that with good level of communication skill, staff could manage to handle the situation smoothly.

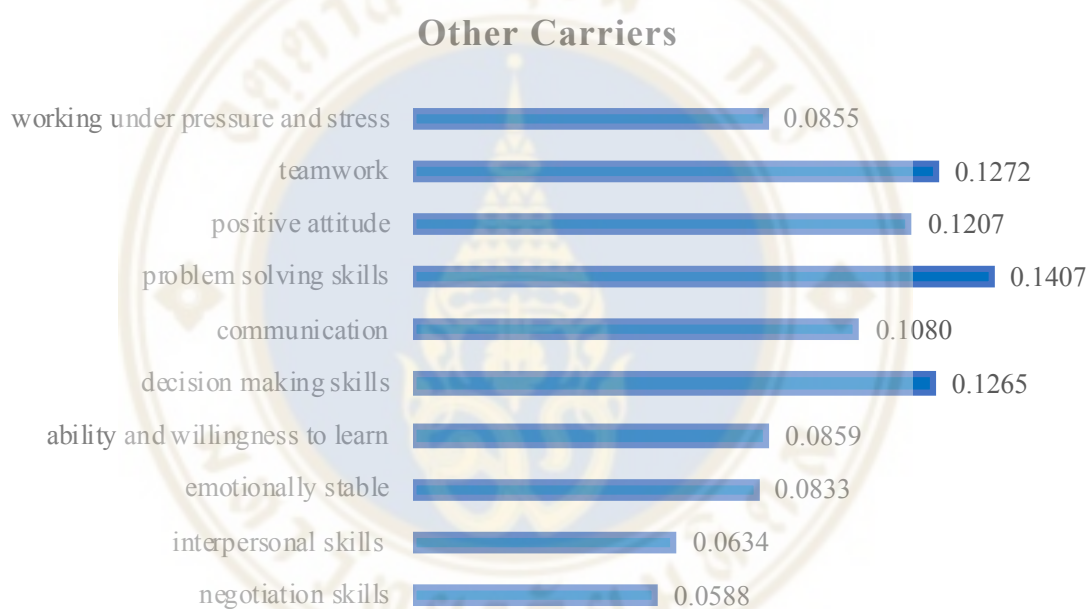


Figure 4.18 The consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Other Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.18 presented the consolidated top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of high-level Other Carrier airline managers. In this research study step, all airlines originating from the Russian Federation, Post-Soviet states, Oceania and Africa etc., were grouped under “Other Carriers”. The total number of the population of the group was 13 and all high-level airline managers in this group participated in the survey yielding the group response rate of 100%. The group consensus results were 73.30%.

Based on the results in figure 4.18, “problem solving skills” (0.1407) was perceived the most important soft skill compared to others, whereas “negotiation skills” (0.0588) was perceived least important soft skill.

Practitioner (61)	European Carriers (9)	Far East & South East Asia Carriers (20)	Middle East & India & Indian Ocean (14)	Thai Carriers (5)	Other Carriers (13)
positive attitude (12.84%)	Positive Attitude (15.12%)	Positive Attitude (13.44%)	Problem solving skills (13.88%)	Communication (17.41%)	Problem solving skills (14.07%)
problem solving skills (12.67%)	Emotionally stable (14.6%)	Decision making skills (12.75%)	Communication (12.04%)	Emotionally stable (16.26%)	Teamwork (12.72%)
Decision making skills (11.84%)	Teamwork (11.69%)	Problem solving skills (12.44%)	Ability and willingness to learn (11.67%)	Decision making skills (12.25%)	Decision making skills (12.65%)
Emotionally stable (11.48%)	Problem solving skills (11.61%)	Teamwork (10.58%)	Teamwork (11.63%)	Positive Attitude (11.56%)	Positive Attitude (12.07%)
Communication (11.24%)	Decision making skills (11.00%)	Emotionally stable (10.12%)	Positive Attitude (11.36%)	Problem solving skills (10.15%)	Communication (10.80%)
Teamwork (10.97%)	Interpersonal skills (8.34%)	Ability and willingness to learn (9.84%)	Decision making skills (9.68%)	Teamwork (7.98%)	Ability and willingness to learn (8.59%)
Ability and willingness to learn (8.12%)	Communication (8.30%)	Communication (9.05%)	Emotionally stable (9.24%)	Working under pressure and stress (7.01%)	Working under pressure and stress (8.55%)
Working under pressure and stress (7.54%)	Working under pressure and stress (8.09%)	Interpersonal skills (8.67%)	Interpersonal skills (7.59%)	Interpersonal skills (6.37%)	Emotionally stable (8.33%)
Interpersonal skills (7.47%)	Ability and willingness to learn (6.51%)	Working under pressure and stress (7.15%)	Negotiation skills (6.65%)	Negotiation skills (5.70%)	Interpersonal skills (6.34%)
Negotiation skills (5.83%)	Negotiation skills (4.74%)	Negotiation skills (5.94%)	Working under pressure and stress (6.26%)	Ability and willingness to learn (5.30%)	Negotiation skills (5.88%)

Figure 4.19 Top 10 most essential soft skills for career advancement from the perception of each airline group (AHP method)

Figure 4.19 showed many commonalities in the top 10 rankings of soft skills being identified by each airline group. Specifically, “positive attitude” and “problem solving skills” were always among the top 5 for all airline groups. The differences in rankings among different airline groups could be due to the different natures of the work environments in which each type of airline supervisor was expected to perform, and the different types of customer demands they had to meet.

Based on the in-depth interview results, a number of airliners mentioned that “interpersonal skills” and “working under pressure and stress” were the skills, which not only the entry-level airline managers should possess but all airliners should be equipped with. Consequently, these 2 skills were ranked among the bottom 4 for all airline groups.

“Negotiation skills” was perceived least important soft skill among 10 soft skills and was always among the bottom 2 for all airline groups. One of the airline station managers mentioned:

The entry-level airline managers should negotiate only to certain extent and only some simple problems. “Negotiation skills” will be crucially needed only for high-level managers. (An airline based in South East Asia)

However, a number of respondents perceived the importance of “negotiation skills” differently. They mentioned:

No “negotiation skills” is needed for airline job as the airline is one of the businesses which is very much strict with the regulation from Headquarter. Hence, the entry-level managers are not allowed to negotiate or bargain anything with the passengers. (An airline based in Far East Asia)



AHP Analytic Hierarchy Process (EVM multiple inputs)

K. D. Goepel Version 11.10.2017

Free web based AHP software on:

<http://bpmsg.com>

Only input data in the light green fields and worksheets!

n= 10 Number of criteria (2 to 10) Scale: 1 AHP 1-9
 N= 5 Number of Participants (1 to 20) α : 0.1 Consensus: 100.0%
 p= 0 selected Participant (0=consol.) 2 7 Consolidated

Objective To determine and rank the essential soft skills for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service in Aviation Business Industry

Author Final Result

Date 31-Jan-18

Thresh: 1E-07

Iterations: 2

EVM check: 9.6E-09

Table	Criterion	Comment	Weights	Rk
1	working under pressure		7.5%	8
2	teamwork/ collaboration		11.0%	6
3	attitude (positive)		12.8%	1
4	problem solving skills		12.7%	2
5	communication		11.2%	5
6	decision making skills		11.8%	3
7	ability and willingness to learn		8.1%	7
8	emotionally stable/interpersonal		11.5%	4
9	interpersonal skills (ability to get along with)		7.5%	9
#	negotiation skills		5.8%	10

Result Eigenvalue lambda: 10.034
 Consistency Ratio 0.37 GCI: 0.01 CR: 0.3%

Matrix	working under pressure and stress	teamwork/ collaboration	attitude (positive)	problem solving skills	communication	decision making skills	ability and willingness to learn emotionally	stable/ interpersonal	interpersonal skills (ability to get along with	negotiation skills	normalized principal Eigenvector	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
working under pressure and stress	1	-	2/3	4/7	1/2	2/3	2/3	1	2/3	1 1/8	1 3/8	7.54%
teamwork/ collaboration	2	1 1/2	-	1	1	7/9	1 2/9	5/6	1 1/2	2	10.97%	
attitude (positive)	3	1 7/9	1	-	1 1/7	1 1/8	1	1 4/7	1 1/8	1 5/6	2 1/7	12.84%
problem solving skills	4	2	1	7/8	-	1 1/6	1	2	1	1 2/3	1 5/6	12.67%
communication	5	1 4/9	1	8/9	6/7	-	1	1 1/2	1	1 1/2	1 4/5	11.24%
decision making skills	6	1 4/7	1 2/7	1	1	1	-	1 1/2	1	1 2/3	2	11.84%
ability and willingness to learn emotionally	7	1	4/5	2/3	1/2	2/3	2/3	-	5/7	1 1/6	1 1/2	8.12%
stable/ interpersonal	8	1 1/2	1 1/5	8/9	1	1	1	1 3/8	-	1 1/3	2	11.48%
interpersonal skills (ability to get along with	9	8/9	2/3	1/2	3/5	2/3	3/5	6/7	3/4	-	1 1/2	7.47%
negotiation skills	10	5/7	1/2	1/2	5/9	5/9	1/2	2/3	1/2	2/3	-	5.83%

Figure 4.20 Sample of AHP Model

4.2.5 The discrepancy among perceptions of each airline group

Though the consolidated data being derived from AHP model was sufficient to shed some lights on personnel development purpose, it was still very much vital to

study the differences in perception and needs of each airline group in order to be able to tailor make the staff qualifications to meet the needs of each group. The differences in rankings among different airline groups could be due to the different natures of the work environments in which each type of airline supervisor was expected to perform, and the different types of customer demands they had to meet.

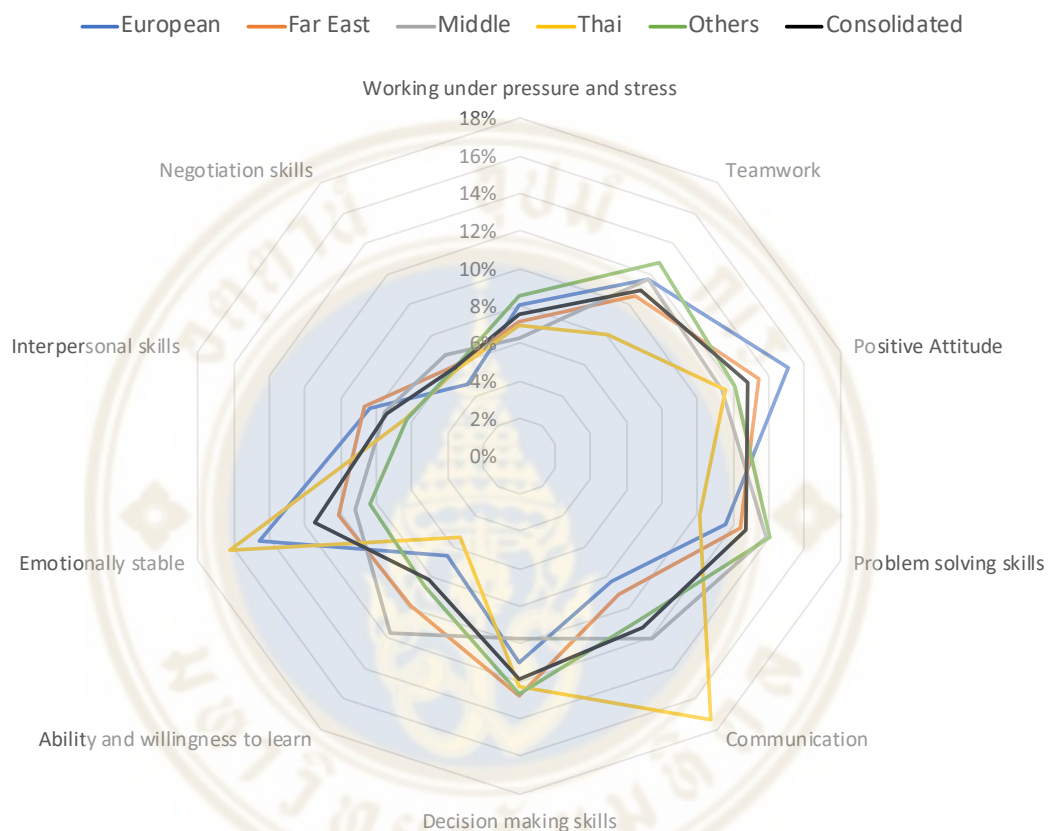


Figure 4.21 The ranking of top 10 most essential soft skills for career advancement in the perception of each airline group vs. the consolidated data

Figure 4.21 was prepared in order to display the different needs of each airline group. As shown, “communication” was perceived as the most important skill for staff working for Thai Carriers, whereas it was perceived by the high-level European Carrier and Far East & South East Asian Carrier airline managers that this skill was not so much important compared to many other skills. To the perception of high-level Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carrier airline managers, “ability and willingness

to learn” was very much important and was ranked in the top three important skills for career advancement.

On the contrary, high-level Thai Carrier airline managers perceived that “ability and willingness to learn” was the least important soft skill among all top ten soft skills. The high-level Thai Carrier and European Carrier airline managers perceived that “emotionally stable” was very much essential and it received the important AHP weight score of 16.26% and 14.6% respectively, whereas only the AHP score of 8.33% was given by the high-level other Carrier airline managers.

Meanwhile, the consensus results among each airline group were between 68.7% (Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers: 14 airline managers) and 73.7% (Other Carriers: 13 airline managers). The group of Thai Carriers airline managers received the consensus rate of 71.4%, followed by Far East & South East Asia Carriers (20 airline managers) and European Carriers (9 airline managers) having the rate of 70.6% and 68.8% respectively.

4.2.6 The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of Thai Carriers

Based on the 2017 data from Airline Operators Committee (AOC), there were total 6 Thai Carriers operating the schedule passenger flights and registering themselves as the airline members of Airline Operators Committee Thailand. Hence, 5 out of 6 airline managers were requested to participate the surveys.

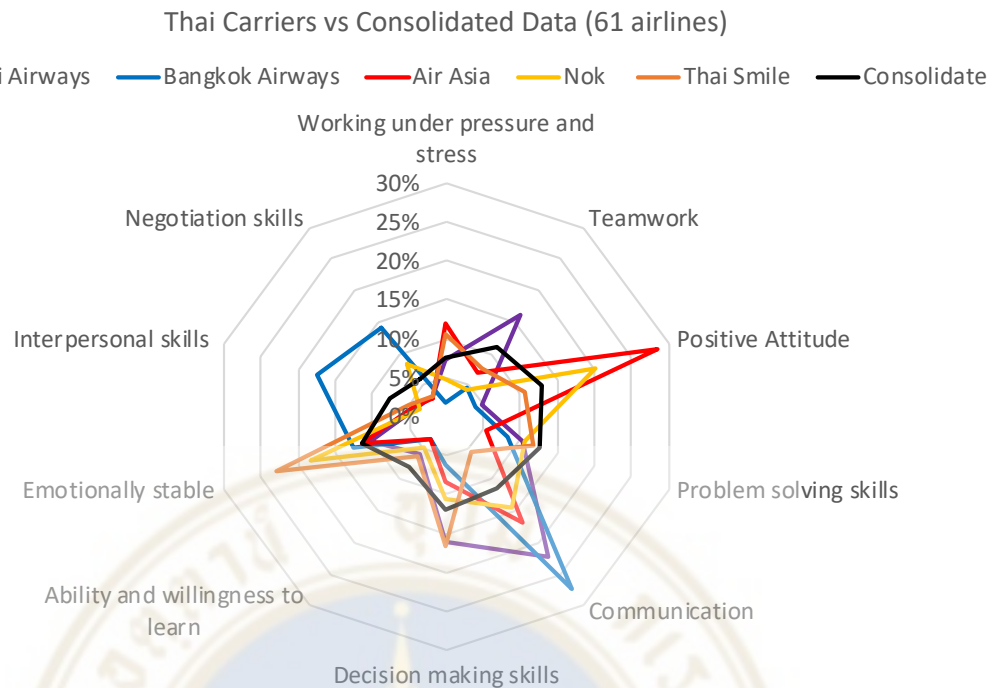


Figure 4.22 The radar chart displays the ranking of top 10 most essential soft skills in the perception of each high-level Thai Carrier airline managers

Figure 4.22 presented that high-level Thai Carrier airline managers viewed “communication” (0.1741) was ranked the most important skills to the perception of high-level Thai Carriers airline managers, followed by “emotionally stable” (0.1626) and “decision making skills” (0.1225), whereas “ability and willingness to learn” (0.0530) was perceived the least essential soft skill among the other 9 skills.

To the perception of both high-level Thai Airways International manager (0.2226) and high-level Bangkok Airways manager (0.2742), “communication” was the most important soft skill for career advancement., whereas both high-level Air Asia (0.2849) manager and high-level Nok (0.2028) manager perceived that “positive attitude” was the most essential soft skill, whereas high-level Thai Smile manager perceived that “emotionally stable” (0.2295) was the most essential soft skill for career advancement in ground passenger service.

Based on the in-depth interview result, the manager shared that currently the service job especially the aviation business is more complex. The airline staff has to be able to communicate effectively with the passengers in order to meet their expectation and to gain their satisfaction. A high-level Thai Airways International manager, Air Asia

manager and Nok Air manager also endorsed the statement. Hence, the score of “communication” of these four airlines was higher than the consolidated score of all 61 airlines.

Having “positive attitude” could lead to the success for the staff working with Air Asia or Nok Air as the AHP scores of more than 20% were given by these high-level airline managers, whereas staff possessing high “communication skills” had better chance in career advancement with Thai Airways International Airline and Bangkok Airways.

Based from the consolidated score, “problem solving skills” was rated on the top three essential soft skills with the average AHP score of around 12.6%, where none of Thai Carrier airline managers gave higher score than the consolidated result of all 61 airlines.

4.2.7 The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of top 5 Skytrax Carriers

Skytrax is the international air transport rating organization being established in 1989 in order to run an airline and airport review and ranking site. Skytrax certified airline ratings, which was introduced in 1999, has been internationally recognized as a global benchmark of airline standards by airlines and media throughout the world. With the certified international rating system, the airlines are classified by the quality of their front line products and staff service standards across both the on-board and airport environments. (Skytrax Website)

According to Skytrax annual report 2017, Qatar Airways has been named the best airline in the world 2017, which is the fourth time Qatar has garnered this honour with wins in 2011, 2012, and 2015. Singapore Airlines, All Nippon Airways, Emirates and Cathay Pacific Airways were ranked as the best airlines in the world respectively. The Skytrax ranking is based on the impressions of 19.87 million travellers from 105 different countries. More than 49 parameters of more than 325 airlines ranging the whole travel experience were measured. (Skytrax Website)

The below radar chart was prepared in order to identify the specific needs of each Skytrax’s top 5 airline.

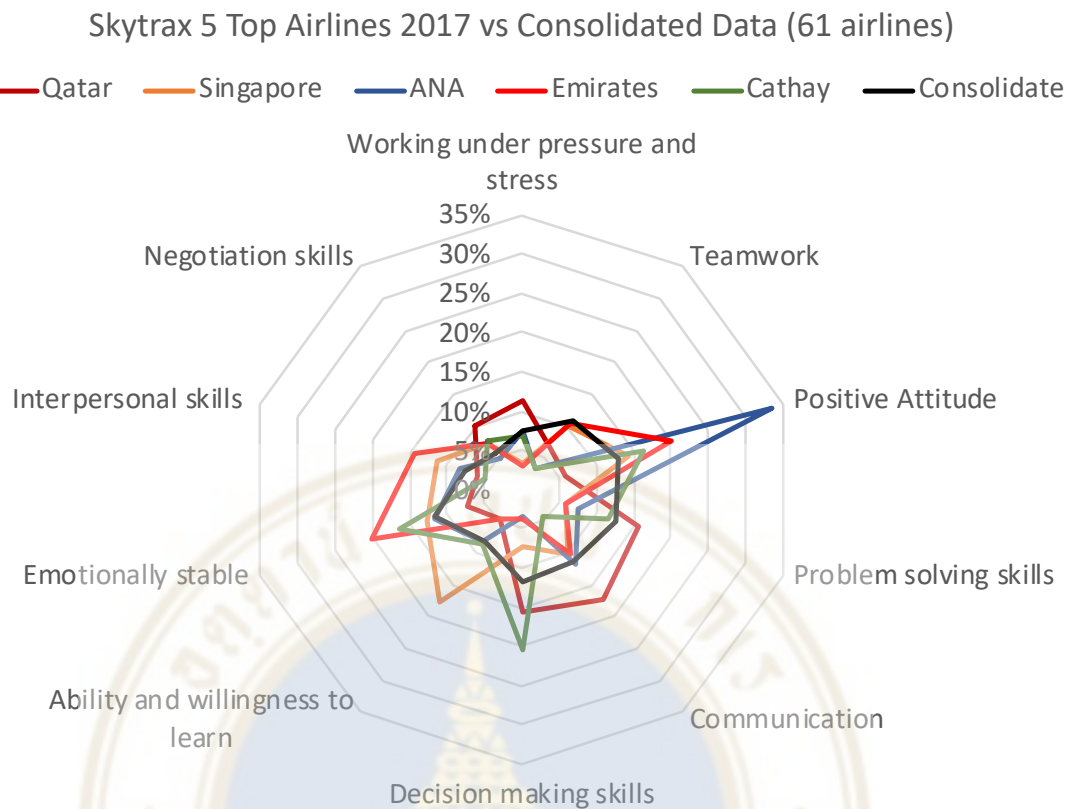


Figure 4.23 The radar chart displays the ranking of top 10 most essential soft skills in the perception of the Skytrax's top 5 airline managers

Figure 4.23 presented that “teamwork”, which was perceived quite important with the AHP score of around 10.97% by all 61 airline managers, was perceived not so much important by all Skytrax's top 5 airline managers.

To the perception of a high-level Qatar Airways manager, “communication” (0.1743) was ranked as the most important soft skills for career advancement and “ability and willingness to learn” (0.0467) was ranked as the least important skill, whereas another middle east carrier in the Skytrax's top 5 airlines mentioned that “positive attitude” (0.1996) and “emotionally stable” (0.1996) were equally viewed as the most important skills for career advancement and “working under pressure and stress” (0.0308) was ranked as the least important skill having the AHP score of only 5%.

A high-level All Nippon Airways manager clearly mentioned to the researcher that “positive attitudes” (0.3358) was the most important skill and it was

confirmed in the AHP result as “positive attitudes” has the AHP score of more than 34%. “Decision making skills” was ranked the least important skill having the AHP score of 0.0311.

The perception of a high-level Singapore Airlines manager was slightly different from other Skytrax’s top 5 airlines as “ability and willingness to learn” (0.1761) was ranked as the most important skill with the AHP score of 18%, whereas “working under pressure and stress” (0.0390) was ranked as the least important skill similar to the result of Emirates.

“Teamwork” (0.0314) was again ranked as the least important soft skill for career advancement by a high-level Cathay Pacific Airways manager with the score of around 3%, whereas “decision making skills” (0.2036) was ranked as the most important skill.

Interestingly, the results from AHP model significantly showed that there was similarity in the perceptions of top 5 Skytrax high-level airline managers. Specifically, “positive attitude” and “emotionally stable” were always among the top 3 for all Skytrax Carriers except Qatar Airways.

Any airlines, who would like to compete to be one of the Skytrax’s top 5 airlines, should look into these key success factors in order to develop their staff further in term of possessed soft skills.

4.2.8 The comparison between the top ten Soft Skills being ranked based on popularity method in the first survey and the consolidated top ten Soft Skills based on pairwise comparison method through AHP model in the second survey

Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model in the second survey, the results showed that the practitioners viewed “positive attitude” as the most important soft skill having an AHP score of 12.84%, whereas “negotiation skills” was perceived as the least important skill compared to the other top ten soft skills.

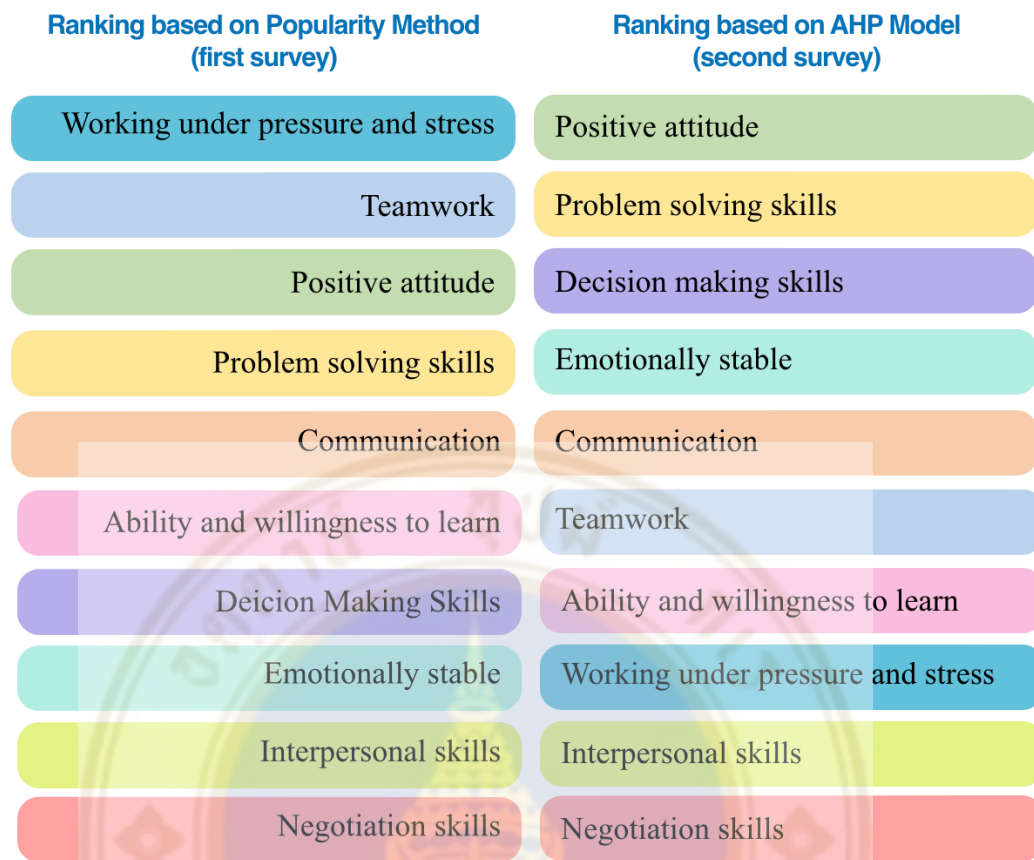


Figure 4.24 Comparison of top ten soft skills from two survey methods

Figure 4.24 showed many commonalities in the top 10 rankings of soft skills being identified through two survey methods in each survey step. Specifically, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills” were always perceived less important compared to the other 8 soft skills. In addition, there were also some skills e.g. “positive attitude”, “problem solving skills”, “communication” and “ability and willingness to learn”, which both surveys showed quite similar results.

On the contrary, there were 4 soft skills, which were ranked differently based on two types of survey methods. These 4 soft skills were “working under pressure and stress”, “teamwork”, “decision making skills” and “emotionally stable”. One of the most different result was “working under pressure and stress”, which was ranked as the most important skill based on popularity method, whereas it was ranked as the eighth soft skill being essential for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service based on the pairwise comparison method through AHP model.

4.2.9 General Soft-Skill Assessment Score

In order to be able to confirm whether the current entry-level airline managers possess the required soft skills as per being identified by the high-level airline managers, a soft-skill assessment tool, which was comprised of 30 multiple-choice questions has been developed. The total score of the soft-skill test is 90, dividing into 10 parts; each part represents each soft skill being identified as the most important soft skills for career advancement by the high-level airline managers during the first research step.

In addition, this soft-skill assessment tool can also be applied as the soft-skill test to identify the potential candidates, who are suitable to be promoted to the higher position.

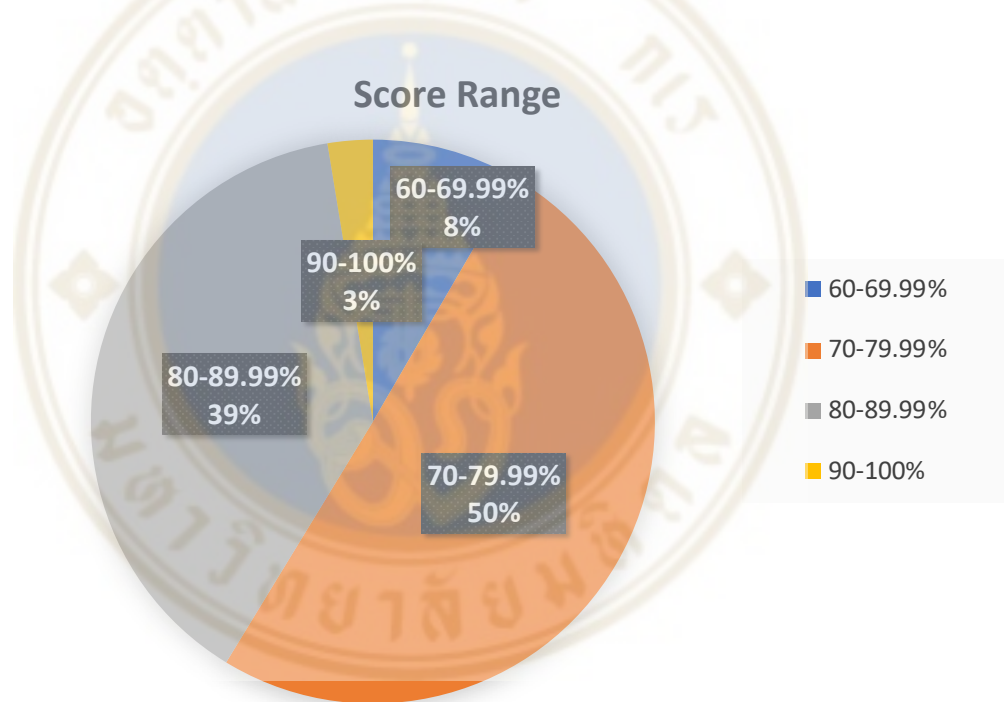


Figure 4.25 The scores overview of all 155 participants.

Total 155 entry-level airline managers working in the Passenger Service Department at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport participated in this research step.

Figure 4.25 presented that 50% of the participants managed to receive the score of between 70-79.99% and 39% of the participants received the score of between 80-89.99%. 3% of the participants successfully managed to earn the score of between 90-100%, whereas another 8% could get only 60-69.99% from the test.

Table 4.2 The breakdown of soft-skill assessment scores overview

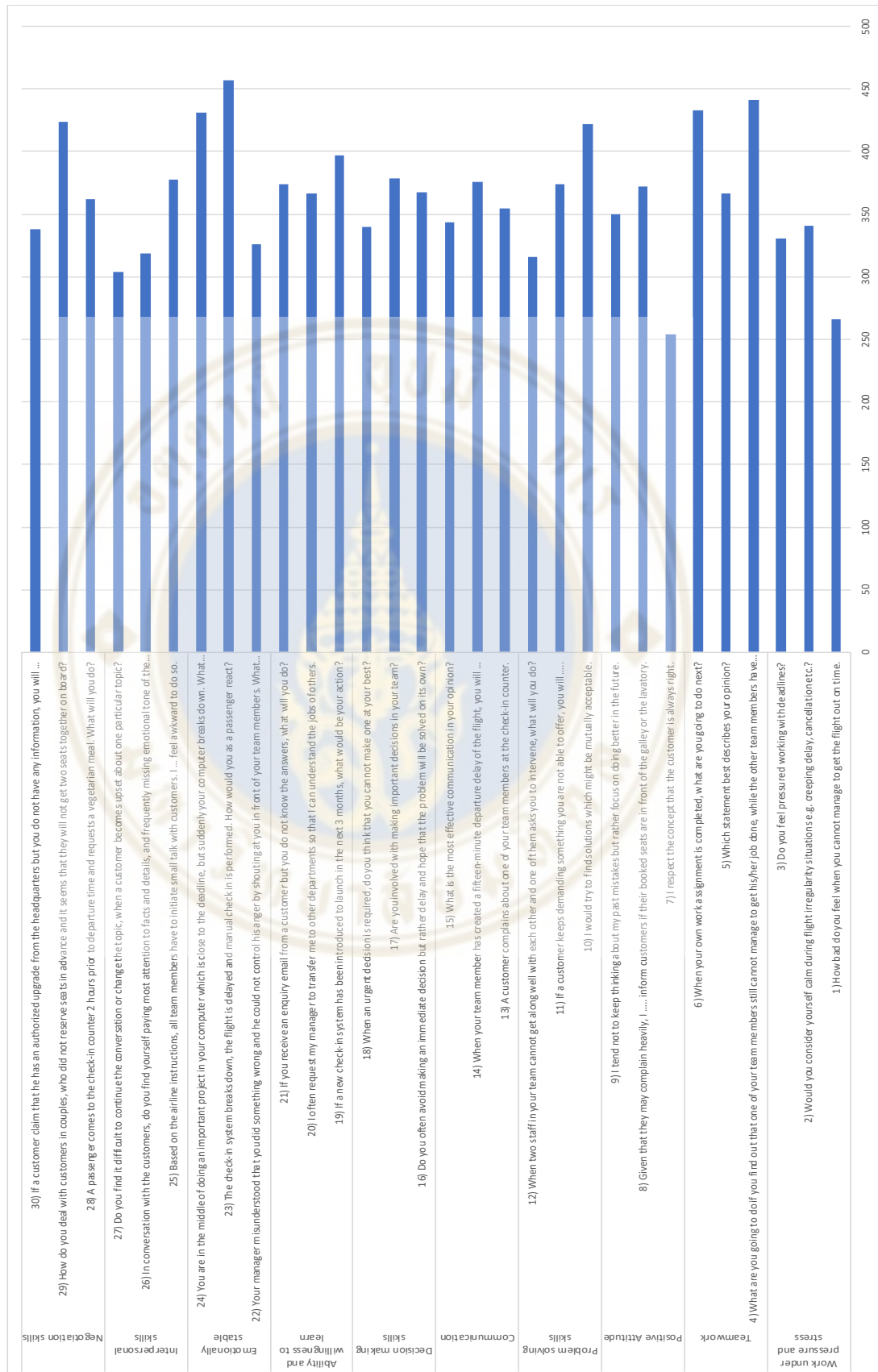
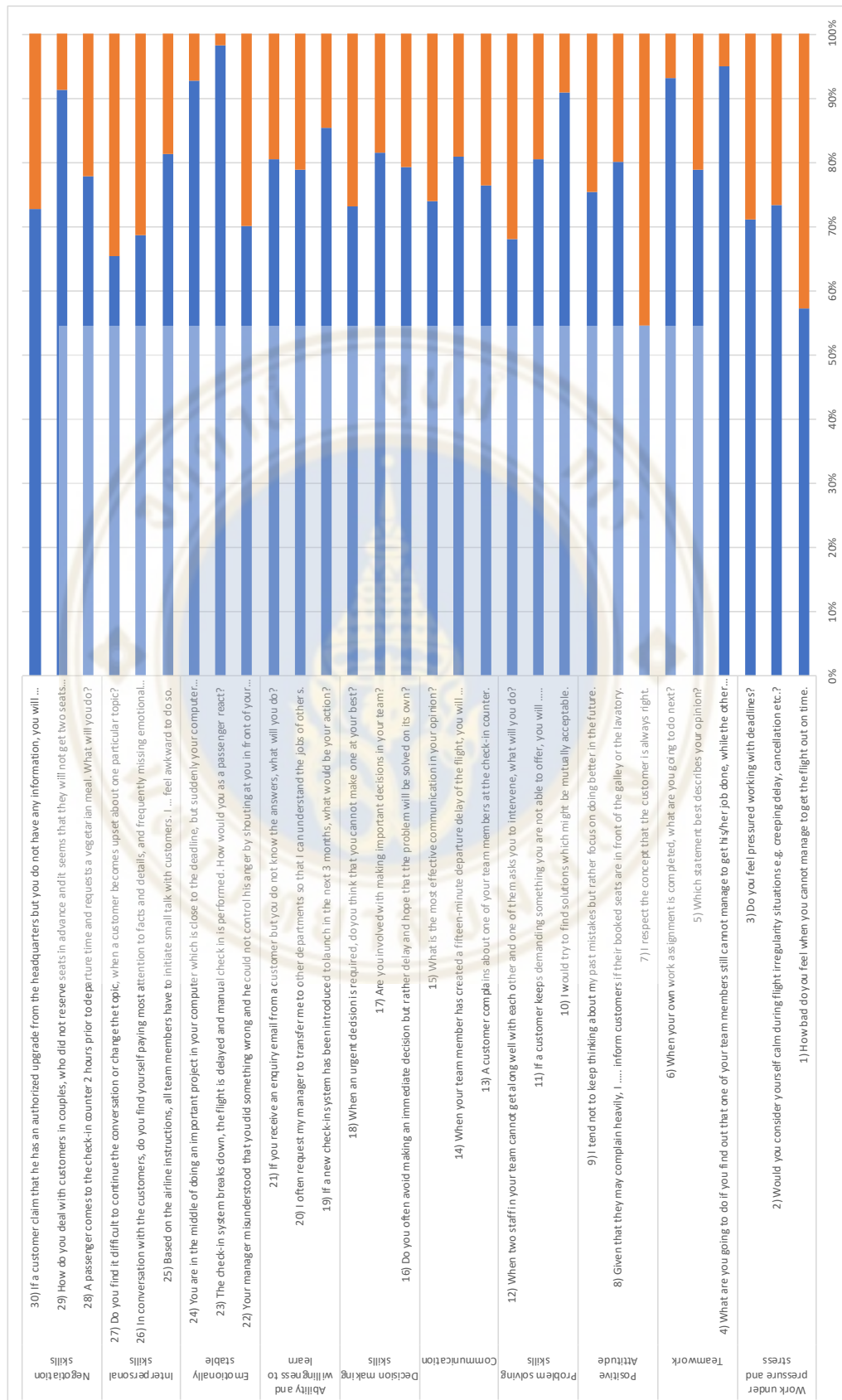


Table 4.3 The breakdown of soft-skill assessment scores overview



4.2.10 The level of possessed top ten Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers

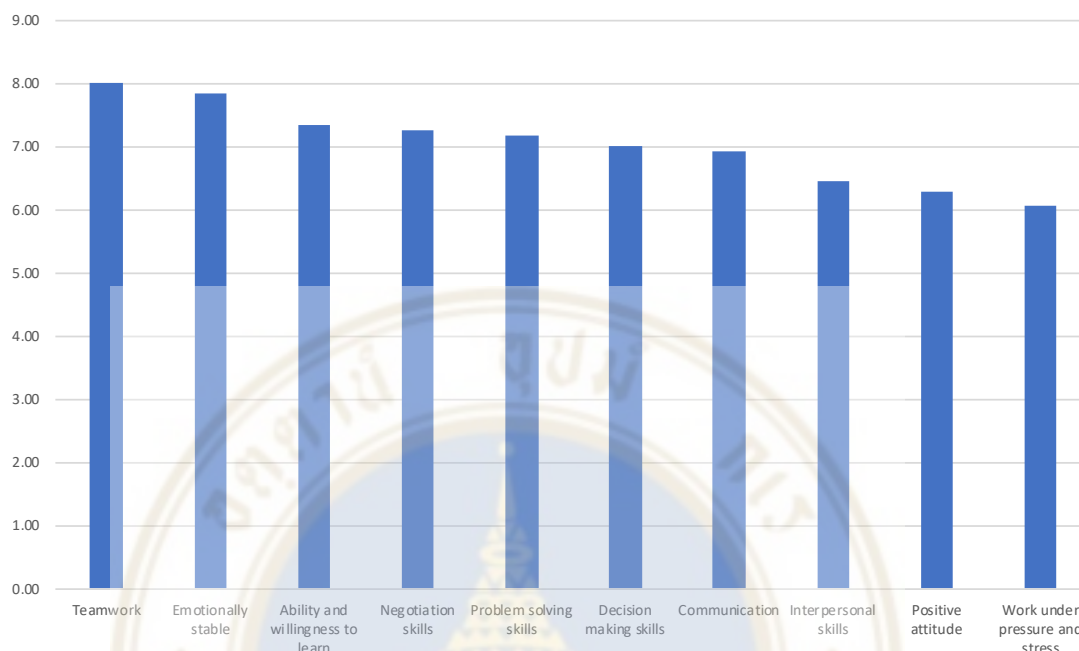


Figure 4.26 The range of the average score of 155 entry-level airline managers.

As mentioned, the assessment sheet was developed to assess the level of soft-skills, which the first entry-level airline managers possessed. The whole test consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions. 3 questions were designed to assess the level of each soft skill they have. Each question has a score range from 1 to 3 points. Consequently, the respondents can get up to 9 points per each soft skill and 90 points for the whole test.

Figure 4.26 presented the range of the average score of 155 entry-level airline managers. The score range was between 6.05-8.01. It was clearly showed that the entry-level airline managers received the highest score in the area of “teamwork” (8.01), followed by “emotionally stable” (7.83) and “ability and willingness to learn” (7.34) respectively, whereas they received the average score of only around 6 out of 9 in the area of “working under pressure and stress” (6.05).

4.2.11 The discrepancy among possessed Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers and the expectation and needs of high-level airline managers

An assessment sheet was developed to measure the level of individual soft skills a first entry level airline manager possessed. Each question had 3 choices for the respondents to answer and each of the choice had a score ranged from 1 to 3 which means that one could receive a maximum of 9 points for each soft skill and 90 points for the whole test.

Table 4.4 Comparison of possessed soft skills by the first-level managers and the actual required skills by the high-level managers

Soft-Skill	Average Score from the test (9 points each)	Ranking of possessed soft-skill (by entry-level managers)	Ranking of required soft-skill (by high-level managers)
Teamwork	8.01	1	6
Emotionally stable	7.83	2	4
Ability and willingness to learn	7.34	3	7
Negotiation skills	7.25	4	10
Problem solving skills	7.17	5	2
Decision making skills	7.01	6	3
Communication	6.94	7	5
Interpersonal skills	6.46	8	9
Positive attitude	6.30	9	1
Work under pressure and stress	6.05	10	8

The result which can be seen in Table 4 was that the top ranking soft skills that high-level airline managers were expecting, were not those soft skills that the entry-level managers were good at. The top three essential soft skills being defined by high-level managers, which were “positive attitude”, “problem solving skills” and “decision making skills”, were ranked only the ninth (6.30), the fifth (7.17) and the sixth (7.01) respectively, whereas the skills that the first entry-level managers were rated high was

“teamwork” (8.01), “emotionally stable” (7.83) and “ability and willingness to learn” (7.34). As a consequence, it can be concluded that the entry-level airline managers still do not have the right skills and still needs to be trained in particular soft-skills, which will be needed for their career advancement in Ground Passenger Service.

Table 4.5 The average score of each assessment question

Ranking	Questions	Average SCORE	Competencies
1	23) The check-in system breaks down, the flight is delayed and manual check in is performed. How would you as a passenger react?	2.95	Emotionally stable
2	4) What are you going to do if you find out that one of your team members still cannot manage to get his/her job done, while the other team members have already left the office.	2.85	Teamwork
3	6) When your own work assignment is completed, what are you going to do next?	2.79	Teamwork
4	close to the deadline, but suddenly your computer breaks down. What would be your reaction?	2.78	Emotionally stable
5	29) How do you deal with customers in couples, who did not reserve seats in advance and it seems that they will not get two seats together on board?	2.74	Negotiation skill
6	10) I would try to find solutions which might be mutually acceptable.	2.72	Problem solving skill
7	19) If a new check-in system has been introduced to launch in the next 3 months, what would be your action?	2.56	Ability and willingness to learn
8	17) Are you involved with making important decisions in your team?	2.45	Decision making skill
9	25) Based on the airline instructions, all team members have to initiate small talk with customers. I ... feel awkward to do so.	2.44	Interpersonal skill
10	14) When your team member has created a fifteen-minute departure delay of the flight, you will ...	2.43	Communication
11	11) If a customer keeps demanding something you are not able to offer, you will	2.41	Problem solving skill
12	21) If you receive an enquiry email from a customer but you do not know the answers, what will you do?	2.41	Ability and willingness to learn
13	8) Given that they may complain heavily, I inform customers if their booked seats are in front of the galley or the lavatory.	2.40	Positive attitude
14	16) Do you often avoid making an immediate decision but rather delay and hope that the problem will be solved on its own?	2.37	Decision making skill
15	5) Which statement best describes your opinion?	2.37	Teamwork
16	20) I often request my manager to transfer me to other departments so that I can understand the jobs of others.	2.37	Ability and willingness to learn
17	28) A passenger comes to the check-in counter 2 hours prior to departure time and requests a vegetarian meal. What will you do?	2.34	Negotiation skill
18	13) A customer complains about one of your team members at the check-in counter.	2.29	Communication
19	9) I tend not to keep thinking about my past mistakes but rather focus on doing better in the future.	2.26	Positive attitude
20	15) What is the most effective communication in your opinion?	2.22	Communication
21	2) Would you consider yourself calm during flight irregularity situations e.g. creeping delay, cancellation etc.?	2.20	Work under pressure and stress
22	18) When an urgent decision is required, do you think that you cannot make one at your best?	2.19	Decision making skill
23	30) If a customer claim that he has an authorized upgrade from the headquarters but you do not have any information, you will ...	2.18	Negotiation skill
24	3) Do you feel pressured working with deadlines?	2.14	Work under pressure and stress
25	22) Your manager misunderstood that you did something wrong and he could not control his anger by shouting at you in front of your team members. What will you do?	2.10	Emotionally stable
26	26) In conversation with the customers, do you find yourself paying most attention to facts and details, and frequently missing emotional tone of the speaker's voice	2.06	Interpersonal skill
27	12) When two staff in your team cannot get along well with each other and one of them asks you to intervene, what will you do?	2.04	Problem solving skill
28	27) Do you find it difficult to continue the conversation or change the topic, when a customer becomes upset about one particular topic?	1.96	Interpersonal skill
29	1) How bad do you feel when you cannot manage to get the flight out on time.	1.72	Work under pressure and stress
30	7) I respect the concept that the customer is always right.	1.64	Positive Attitude

Table 4.5 presented the average score of each assessment question. Each question has a score range from 1 to 3 points. Hence, the maximum score of each question was 3.00, whereas the lowest score could be 0.00. Based on table 5, it was showed that almost all respondents got 3 points from one of the 3 questions being design

to test the level of “emotionally stable”. To conclude, the entry-level airline managers do not possess the required soft-skill for career advancement because they received the average score of only 1.64 out of 3.00 for one of the three questions being designed to check the possession of “positive attitude” skill, which was ranked the most important soft skill for career advancement in ground passenger service.



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter presents a summary of the study's findings where the answers to the research questions and objectives are stressed. Further, both theoretical and managerial contributions of the study are listed. To conclude, a detailed explanation of the study's limitations was done by the researcher, whilst suggesting future research topics.

5.1 Summary

Aviation business has been regarded as one of the five industrial sectors each known as “First S-Curve” and “New S-Curve”, which were introduced as a framework to achieve a leap growth of Thai Economy. The government took much effort to attract investments in these targeted industries. As a result, the aviation business is very much booming and many international airlines had already planned to expand their route network by flying to Thailand. Consequently, the demand of the skilled labour in the industry would unquestionably tremendously increase.

The overall objective of this research study was 1) to investigate between airlines' and educators' perceptions; 2) to investigate which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for successful career advancement in ground passenger service in the perceptions of airlines and educators; 3) to develop a personnel promotion strategy by identifying specific sets of criteria or the set of required soft-skills of each airline group; and 4) to provide practical implications for all stakeholders to bridge the discrepancy gaps.

In-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were employed to collect data from all stakeholders including high-level airline managers, educators in aviation program from universities across Thailand and entry-level airline managers. Data were analysed using means, percentages and chi-square test for the first stage of

the study, while the complexity of identifying the criteria set along with the subjectivity of these criteria in the second stage of the study required the use of multi-criteria decision making approach particularly the analytic hierarchy process (AHP). The assessment tool being developed from a number of personality test was used to analyse and conclude the third research step.

Most airlines and university instructors agreed that soft skills were essential for career advancement for ground passenger service jobs. Results also showed that there were discrepancies between the perceptions of top ten essential skills identified by airlines and educators. Specifically, chi-square results showed that there were significantly difference in perceptions of airlines and education in seven out of seventy soft skills. Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, it was shown that popularity ranking method yielded quite similar results the ranking results by AHP model. There were only 4 soft skills, which were perceived differently. At last, based on the results of the assessment, it was clearly shown that there was a mismatch between the possessed skills of the current entry-level airline managers and the required needs of the high-level airline managers. The entry-level airline managers still did not have the right skills and still needed to be trained in particular soft-skills, which would be needed for career advancement in Ground Passenger Service.

5.1.1 General perceptions towards soft skills

Both high-level airline managers and university educators agreed that soft skills were essential for career success in ground passenger service. Most practitioners (90%) and educators (93%) agreed that adding soft skills into the university curriculum would provide better equipped personnel for the industry and empower them for their career advancement. In addition, most practitioners (72%) and educators (86%) agreed that there was a gap between the industry requirements and the quality of the university graduates today. Only 71% of the educators agreed that soft skills were more important than other attributes e.g. technical knowledge whereas 84% of the practitioners thought that they were crucial. However, 74% of the educators believed that practitioners were satisfied with the current workforce while only 20% of the practitioners mentioned that they were satisfied. This result clearly indicated the discrepancy among the two parties.

5.1.2 The top ten soft skills in the perceptions of airlines and educators

The top ten skills identified by airlines were 1) being able to work under pressure and stress, 2) teamwork, 3) positive attitude, 4) problem solving skills, 5) communication skills, 6) decision making skills, 7) ability and willingness to learn, 8) emotionally stable, 9) interpersonal skills and 10) negotiation skills. On the other hand, the top 10 essential soft skills to the perceptions of educators were 1) positive attitude, 2) communication skills, 3) ability and willingness to learn, 4) teamwork, 5) problem solving skills, 6) adaptability skills, 7) conflict/ dispute resolutions, 8) being able to work under pressure and stress, 9) common sense and 10) decision making skills.

5.1.3 The discrepancy among perceptions of the airlines and educators

Chi-square results showed that there was a significant difference in perceptions of airlines and educators in seven out of seventy soft skills. They were 1) ability and willingness to learn, 2) adaptability, 3) assertiveness, 4) communication, 5) conflict/ dispute resolution skills, 6) planning and organizing and 7) work under pressure and stress. Both parties agreed that four soft skills were not necessary for advancement in ground passenger service career; namely 1) adaptability, 2) assertiveness, 3) conflict/ dispute resolution skills, and 4) planning and organizing. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant discrepancy in viewing three soft skills. Unlike educators, airlines viewed that ability and willingness to learn and communication were not required traits to be successful while work under pressure and stress was viewed as important.

5.1.4 The ranking of top ten Soft Skills in the perception of each airline group

Based on the results being derived from AHP model, many commonalities in the top 10 rankings of soft skills being identified by each airline group was shown. Specifically, “positive attitude” and “problem solving skills” were always among the top 5 for all airline groups. The consolidated top ten soft skills identified by airlines were 1) positive attitude, 2) problem solving skills, 3) decision making skills, 4)

emotionally stable, 5) communication, 6) teamwork, 7) ability and willingness to learn, 8) working under pressure and stress, 9) interpersonal skills and 10) negotiation skills.

5.1.5 The comparison between the top ten Soft Skills being ranked based on popularity method in the first survey and the consolidated top ten Soft Skills based on pairwise comparison method through AHP model in the second survey

Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, it was shown that popularity ranking method yielded quite similar results to the ranking results by AHP model, which are 1) communication, 2) interpersonal skills, 3) negotiation skills, 4) positive attitude, 5) problem solving skills and 6) ability and willingness to learn. There were only 4 soft skills, which were perceived differently. These skills were 1) working under pressure and stress, 2) teamwork, 3) decision making skills and 4) emotionally stable.

5.1.6 The discrepancy among perceptions of each airline group

Though the consolidated data being derived from AHP model was sufficient to shed some lights on personnel development purpose, it was still very much vital to study the differences in perception and needs of each airline group in order to be able to tailor make the staff' qualifications to meet the needs of each group. Based on the results, it was shown that there were 3 significant difference among perceptions of each airline group. These skills were 1) communication, 2) ability and willingness to learn, 3) emotionally stable.

Meanwhile, the consensus results among each airline group are between 68.7% (Middle East & India & Indian Ocean Carriers: 14 airline managers) and 73.7% (Other Carriers: 13 airline managers). The group of Thai Carriers airline managers received the consensus rate of 71.4%, followed by Far East & South East Asia Carriers (20 airline managers) and European Carriers (9 airline managers) having the rate of 70.6% and 68.8% respectively.

5.1.7 The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of Thai Carriers

Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, the result showed that 61 practitioners from all 5 various airline groups viewed “positive attitude” as the most important soft skill among all top ten soft skills, followed by “problem solving skills” and “decision making skills”, whereas “communication” was ranked as the most important skills to the perception of high-level Thai Carriers airline managers, followed by “emotionally stable” and “decision making skills”.

On the contrary, “problem solving skills” was rated on the top three essential soft skills with the average AHP score of around 12.6%, where none of Thai Carrier airline managers gave higher score than the consolidated result of all 61 airlines.

5.1.8 The comparison between the consolidated top ten Soft Skills of all 61 airlines and the top ten Soft Skills of top 5 Skytrax Carriers

Based on the results from the pairwise comparison method through AHP model, it was clearly shown that “teamwork”, which was perceived quite important with the AHP score of around 10.97% by all 61 airline managers, was perceived not so much important by all Skytrax’s top 5 airline managers.

Interestingly, the results from AHP model significantly showed that there was similarity in the perceptions of top 5 Skytrax high-level airline managers. Specifically, “positive attitude” and “emotionally stable” were always among the top 3 for all Skytrax Carriers except Qatar Airways.

5.1.9 General Soft-Skill Assessment Score

In order to be able to confirm whether the current entry-level airline managers possess the required soft skills as per being identified by the high-level airline managers, a soft-skill assessment tool, which was comprised of 30 multiple-choice questions has been developed. The total score of the soft-skill test is 90, dividing into 10 parts; each part represents each soft skill being identified as the most important soft skills for career advancement by the high-level airline managers during the first research step.

Based on the results of the assessment being done by 155 entry-level airline managers, it was shown that 50% of the participants managed to receive the score of between 70-79.99% and 39% of the participants received the score of between 80-

89.99%. 3% of the participants successfully managed to earn the score of between 90-100%, whereas another 8% could get only 60-69.99% from the test.

5.1.10 The level of possessed top ten Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers

The assessment score showed that the entry-level airline managers managed to receive the highest score in the area of 1) teamwork (8.01), followed by 2) emotionally stable (7.83) and 3) ability and willingness to learn (7.34) respectively, whereas they received the average score of only around 6 out of 9 in the area of “working under pressure and stress” (6.05).

5.1.11 The discrepancy among possessed Soft Skills of the entry-level airline managers and the expectation and needs of high-level airline managers

Based on the results of the assessment, it was clearly shown that the top ranking soft skills that high-level airline managers were expecting, were not those soft skills that the entry-level managers were good at. The top three essential soft skills being defined by high-level managers, which were “positive attitude”, “problem solving skills” and “decision making skills”, were ranked only the ninth (6.30), the fifth (7.17) and the sixth (7.01) respectively, whereas the skills that the first entry-level managers were rated high was “teamwork” (8.01), “emotionally stable” (7.83) and “ability and willingness to learn” (7.34).

In addition, it was shown that the respondents received the average score of only 1.64 out of 3.00 for one of the three questions being designed to check the possession of “positive attitude” skill, which was ranked the most important soft skill for career advancement in ground passenger service.

As a consequence, it can be concluded that the entry-level airline managers still do not have the right skills and still needs to be trained in particular soft-skills, which will be needed for their career advancement in Ground Passenger Service.

5.2 Discussions

In this sub-chapter, the key findings being explained in the preceding chapters are discussed in the order of the objectives of this study. The similarities and differences from the research study are highlighted in relation to the theoretical and literature grounds reviewed. In addition, the research study's findings will be as well compared with the aim to suggest propositions for further studies whilst responding to the research questions. At last, the discussion is grounded on the key topics outlined in chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.

Objective 1: the perceptions of airliners and educators towards the importance of soft skills for career advancement in ground passenger service

The results showed that both airliners and educators perceived soft skills as important in the career advancement of ground passenger service staff. Knowledge or hard skills alone were not sufficient for ground passenger staff to advance in their career. This might be because this field of work was sort of a contact point of airline service. There were direct interactions between passengers and staff all the time. Soft skills such as people and communication skills were therefore important in getting the job done successfully. These findings support those of most other studies by various authors and organizations including Deepa and Manisha (2013); Klaus (2010); Mitchell et al. (2010); Meenakshi (2009); Glenn (2008); Watts & Watts (2008); Wilhelm (2004). The results were also aligned with studies conducted by such major organizations as Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center indicating that the competencies that were most essential for staff were soft skills. In addition, the current research study showed that 90% of high-level airline managers and another 93% of the current university educators confirmed that adding soft skills in the university curricula would better equip graduates with what the industry looked for. This idea was supported by Evenson's study in 1999 stating that soft skills could be integrated into university curriculum. Individual job performance significantly increased when soft skills were possessed and applied by employees (Homer, 2001; Kantrowitz, 2005). Ibrahim et al. (2017) also reported a strong empirical support for the causal relationship between soft skills acquired by employees and their job performance. Also, the more employees acquired and used their soft skills, the more they developed positive behavior and

attitude towards their job, and hence this led to a better job performance. All these statements from the past research studies were confirmed by the current research study as 80% of high-level airline managers and another 91% of university educators agreed upon.

Objective 2: which soft skills were necessary to prepare students for successful career advancement in ground passenger service in the perceptions of airlines and educators

Airlines perceived that these ten soft skills were important for career advancement for ground passenger service staff. They were “being able to work under pressure and stress” being the most important soft skill having 57% of respondents strongly agreed upon. “Teamwork/collaboration” and “positive attitude” were equally viewed as second attributes with 54% of respondents choosing the strongly agree option. The other seven essential soft skills identified by airlines were “problem solving skills”, “communication skills”, “decision making skills”, “ability and willingness to learn”, “emotionally stable”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills.” Airlines viewed “being able to work under pressure and stress” as being the most important because they sure knew that stress and pressure were unavoidable in the work of ground passenger staff. Anyone who could not handle stress well would likely fail in providing good service to passengers. On the other hand, educators viewed the following ten soft skills as being important. “Positive attitude” was viewed as the most important soft skill by educators with 71% strongly agreed upon. This was followed by “communication skills” and “ability and willingness to learn” with 63% and 61% educators agreed upon respectively. The other seven soft skills were “teamwork” and “problem solving skills”, “adaptability skills”, “conflict/ dispute resolutions”, and “being able to work under pressure and stress”, “common sense” and “decision making skills”. The reason why educators considered “positive attitude” as being the most important might be because they thought that attitude came first in the service jobs. Should anyone have the right attitude, they should be able to handle things well. The ten skills identified by both parties were similar to other researchers’ findings. For example, the study of Deepa S et al. (2013) revealed that “communication skills” was ranked to be the most important soft skills to the perception of 160 mid-level to top level executive in India, who were involved in recruiting employees which was aligned with both high-level airline

managers and universities educators in Thailand who both pointed out that communication was among the top 5 essential soft skill for career advancement in ground passenger service.

In a study of Lisa G. et al. (2013), industry professionals and hospitality educators (second round) and the past 5 years' graduates of a mid-western university's hospitality management program (final round) were asked to participate in online surveys to determine which competencies alumni of an undergraduate hospitality program perceived to be most important in their careers and whether a significant difference existed in essential competencies. According to the survey results, the two most essential soft competencies in this study were "developing positive customer relations" and "working effectively with peers", which were quite similar to the current research study with both major stakeholders in aviation business as according to the current research study, "interpersonal skills" and "teamwork" were among the top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of the high-level airline managers.

N. Seetha (2014) revealed that "communication skills", "positive attitude" and "teamwork" were the top 3 ranked skills that were identified as critical soft skills being needed at the Malaysian workplace. The current study supported what Seetha indicated in his work. "Communication skills", "positive attitude" and "teamwork" were among the top 5 for both stakeholders in this study.

Objective 3: the discrepancies between the perceptions of the two main stakeholders. This study would provide practical implications for all parties involved: graduates, academic institutions and airline companies.

The comparison between airliner's and educators' perceptions of which soft skills were required for career advancement of ground passenger handling jobs showed that there were significantly difference in perception of airliners and education in seven skills of the soft skills. They were ability and willingness to learn, adaptability, assertiveness, communication, conflict/dispute resolution skills, planning and organizing and work under pressure and stress. Specifically, both parties agreed that four soft skills were not necessary for advancement in ground passenger service career; namely adaptability, assertiveness, conflict/dispute resolution skills, and planning and organizing. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant discrepancy in

viewing three soft skills. Unlike educators, airliners viewed that ability and willingness to learn and communication were not required traits to be successful while work under pressure and stress was viewed as important.

The study indicated that “adaptability”, “conflict/dispute resolution skills” and “common sense” were among the top ten skills by educators but the airliners thought otherwise. On the other hand, “emotionally stable”, “interpersonal skills” and “negotiation skills” which were viewed as the top ten list by airliners, but the educators had different views. The differences in the perceptions of both parties could be because the educators still do not have the full picture of what the practitioners need or have to do in their routine job. Nowadays, passengers are more and more demanding and expecting high service level, while the airline companies attempt to keep the cost to the minimum. Consequently, with the limited resources, the front line staff cannot fulfil all the passengers’ requirements, which leads to the low satisfaction of the passengers. Therefore, staff dealing with this situation must possess high level of EQ and interpersonal skills in order to control the situation as smooth as it can be.

Due to a number of rules and regulations in airline business, which all staff have to adhere to, the front line staff have not much room to explore their initiate solutions but to follow the defined instructions. Hence, “common sense” and “adaptability” were not the skills, which the entry-level managers should possess more than other soft skills. For instance, the common sense leads the manager to one solution, which should be best for the passengers but the managers can also not pick this solution unless it is according to the rules and regulations. This provided reason is similar to the case of having adaptability skills as the managers are not allowed to deviate from the defined rules and regulations. Regarding to the conflict/ dispute resolution skills, it is inevitably for a service sector like airline business to avoid conflicts. On the contrary,

In addition, the findings also confirmed the findings and statements of other authors over the past ten years regarding the misperception of job requirements by the employers (Rosenbaum and Person, 2003). Findings from the questions in the first research step showed that 3 out of the consolidated most top 10 essential soft skills to the perception of both stakeholders were different, which led to the assumption that there was the skills mismatch between the skills that an employer expected and the skills the educational institutions equipped their graduates. In addition, it was again confirmed

by the discrepancies between the perception of both stakeholders towards the satisfaction of the practitioners to the current workforce.

Objective 4: the ranking of each essential soft skill of each airline group and the discrepancies between the perceptions of each airline group based on their needs.

In order to be able to tailor make the staff's qualifications to meet the needs of each group. The study of the needs of each airline group was performed. Based on the consolidated data being derived from AHP model, the results pointed out many commonalities in the top 10 rankings of soft skills being identified by each airline group. Specifically, "positive attitude" and "problem solving skills" were always among the top 5 for all airline groups, while "interpersonal skills" and "working under pressure and stress" were always rated in the bottom 5 essential soft skills. This could be because the practitioners perceive that the first-entry level managers are in the position, which inevitably require high level of contacts with all team members, passengers, and high-level managers. Therefore, this person has to be equipped with the right mindset to balance themselves among all stakeholders. And in those cases, attitude has proven itself the more important factor in success. In addition, staff with positive attitude will not only bring in the success to the company but will also bring in the good working atmosphere among team members. As a matter of fact that the aviation business is the service business, the good working atmosphere will definitely reflect to the level and the quality of the service. On another hand, time constraint is also one of the most challenging factors of aviation business especially for the front line staff at the airport as everything has to be finished within due time namely the departure time. Hence, having only the right attitude could be not sufficient to ensure the on time departure of the flights. Hence, "problem solving skills" was also one of the most crucial soft skills, which the entry-level managers have to possess. On the contrary, the airlines might perceive that "interpersonal skills" and "working under pressure and stress" were the common and general skills, which not only the entry-level airline managers should possess but all airlines should be equipped with in order to work in the aviation industry. So, both skills were always rated in the bottom 5 essential soft skills.

Apart from the mentioned skills, "negotiation skills" was as well perceived least important soft skill among 10 soft skills and was always among the bottom 2 for

all airline groups. This might be because the managers perceived “negotiation skills” was not the skill for the career advancement but the skills, which all front line staff in all levels must possess in order to deal with the passengers smoothly. In addition, it could be because the managers found that the airline has clear regulation, programmed decision and the scope of authority. Consequently, all negotiations could not be out of the designed frame and the high-level airline managers also would like their staff to be perceived by the customers that the staff needed to strictly follow the instruction.

On the contrary, the results as well clearly indicated that “communication” was perceived as the most important skill for staff working for Thai Carriers, whereas it was perceived by the high-level European Carrier and Far East & South East Asian Carrier airline managers that this skill was not so much important compared to many other skills. This could be because of seniority and hierarchy being strongly present in the Thai culture. Titles or positions of people in the government, politic, military companies etc. must be respected. Communication with those hierarchies or seniors is therefore very important. Proper word selection is crucial especially in airline business, where lots of rules and regulations are applied. Thai airlines therefore determined that communication skill is the most important quality for their staff to have because the majority of their passengers are Thai National. This was supported by the work of Lin (2002) as it was revealed that communication skills and adaptation to environmental changes are the most important competency dimensions for career success. Besides, it was as well pointed out in the work of N. Seetha (2014) that in the Malaysian workplace, communication skills were one of the top 3 ranked essential skills.

Nonetheless, the differences in rankings among different airline groups could be due to the different natures of the work environments in which each type of airline supervisor was expected to perform, and the different types of customer demands they had to meet.

Objective 5: how to develop an assessment tool in form of the Personality Test to assess the possessed skills of the candidates for career advancement.

In order to be able to confirm whether the current entry-level airline managers possess the required soft skills as per being identified by the high-level airline managers, a soft-skill assessment tool, which was comprised of 30 multiple-choice questions has

been developed. The total score of the soft-skill test is 90, dividing into 10 parts; each part represents each soft skill being identified as the most important soft skills for career advancement by the high-level airline managers during the first research step. Those soft skills were 1) being able to work under pressure and stress, 2) teamwork, 3) positive attitude, 4) problem solving skills, 5) communication skills, 6) decision making skills, 7) ability and willingness to learn, 8) emotionally stable, 9) interpersonal skills and 10) negotiation skills.

From the total 30 multiple questions in the assessment sheet, 3 questions were designed to assess the level of each soft skill they have. Each question has 3 choices for the respondents to answer and each of the choice has a score ranged from 1 to 3 points. Consequently, the respondents can receive a maximum of 9 points for each soft skill and 90 points for the whole test.

Hence, this soft-skill assessment tool can be applied as the soft-skill test to identify the potential candidates, who are suitable to be promoted to the higher position in the aviation business as the assessment criteria are the criteria being required and defined by the practitioners unlike the other personality tests in the market e.g. the IQ Workout Series “More Psychometric Testing” by Carter and Russell (2003), The Aptitude Test Workbook by Jim Barrett (2008), Aptitude, Personality and Motivation Tests by Jim Barrett (2009) etc., because almost all personality tests in the market were developed from the psychologists and their assessment criteria could be different from what the airline practitioners required. In addition, the questions in the assessment tool being developed from this research study were as well exclusively designed to assess the reaction of the candidates/respondents in their routine job e.g. their decision in case of flight irregularity, their reaction to the complaints of the passengers, their decision to the particular cases etc.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

The results of this research were aligned with the studies carried out by Gunz and Jalland (1996) and Lau & Shaffer (1999). There was a strong relation between level of soft skills and career advancement. In addition, it had been confirmed that there

was a discrepancy between the skills that airline employers expected and those skills that educational institutions equipped their students with.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations

As stated above, this research study would provide practical implications for all parties involved: academic institutions, airline companies and individual graduates. The recommendations were as follows:

5.3.1 Managerial Implication for academic sector

Due to the rapid growth of the aviation industry in Thailand, the demand of the skilled labour in the industry would unquestionably increase. More and more students would like to get into this business. The academic sector is considered to be one of the key players in driving the growth of the industry as they have a major impact on the students' development during the university time and they are also regarded as the workforce providers, who supply graduates to the labour market.

Employers are interested in tapping into vital soft skills obtained by employees during study, rather than just degree-specific knowledge (Roybould and Sheedy, 2005) This statement endorsed the view of Evenson (1999) who believed that equipping students with the soft skills could make the difference in obtaining and retaining the jobs for which they have been prepared. The work of Adnan et.al. (2012) indicated that the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia has identified seven key skills to be incorporated in the curriculum design of undergraduate programs at public university in Malaysia.

To ensure success of the students in the 21st century, the students must be equipped with the right skills. The results of this research study would be beneficial for educational institutes to help their students assessing their career paths relating to personality factors. The following recommendations are to be considered for all educational institutions.

1. Creating awareness of the essence of soft-skill
 - 1.1 Raising awareness regarding the essence of soft skills not only among the students but also among the educators
 - 1.2 Encouraging students to practice and improve their skills

2. Collaboration with the stakeholders

- 2.1 Taking the initiative to reach out to the business community in order to better address the topics of building appropriate skills development into the curricula by holding Academic Seminars or National Conferences to create a communication platform between educators and industrial sectors
- 2.2 Inviting stakeholders to provide their view and discuss the subject contents, the curricular and the teaching methods in order to learn about the expectation of the industry and also about the industry trend
- 2.3 Seeking collaboration with the private sector as well as the public sector in order to generate common benefits
- 2.4 Working collaboratively with industry to be updated of what is required by the industry.
- 2.5 Considering to include the practitioners with training skills to deliver some courses or some parts of the course in the university

3. Revising and enhancing the current curriculum

- 3.1 Incorporating identified top essential soft skills by airlines into the current university curriculum
- 3.2 Refining present university curriculum to include topics which directly relate on how to develop soft-skill competencies to ensure that future graduates possessed the exact soft skills required and expected by airlines
- 3.3 Balancing the preparation of students for both technical skills and soft skills
- 3.4 Embedding the essential soft skills into the teaching of hard skills
- 3.5 Having students demonstrating the soft skills they have learned by using the role-play exercises in a mock business setting

- 3.6 Giving the students opportunities to practice their skills on real life situation such as group discussions on how to work under pressure, how to negotiate or how to solve problems
- 3.7 Giving the opportunity to the students to apply and practice the soft skills in supervised work experiences e.g. having internship with the airline company
- 3.8 Offering specific soft-skill courses in the university e.g. communication skills, negotiation skills and interpersonal skills etc.

One of the main challenges of soft skills training faced by the educators is that it is hard to figure out how to teach, to define and assess the level of soft skills and to capture the impact of such programs on students (Holtom & Bowen, 2007; Zehr, 1998).

The outcomes of soft skills training are often intangible and provide gradual or deferred returns (Onisk, 2011). Hence, the educators have to develop the methods and the tools to quantify the skills of their students.

At last, in order to ensure that the students are meeting the needs of the aviation industry in today's rapidly changing, diverse and global business environment, it is necessary to continually assess which soft skills are essential for both employability and career advancement purpose.

5.3.2 Managerial Implication for aviation industry

Due to the emergence and the growth of low-cost carriers, the dynamics of air transportation markets and airline competition in virtually every region of the world have been changed. To survive in the current competitive and dynamic business world, the airline company has to be very much looking into their cost structure in order to deliver the best service quality with the lowest cost. One of the main areas, which has to be focused is Human Resource Management.

The research results were beneficial for human resource personnel of airline companies when formulating human resource strategies ranging from recruiting, selecting, developing and promoting the workforce to labor relations. The following

recommendations are to be considered for both airline companies and ground handling companies.

1. Recruitment Process

The key asset in the service industry is employee. Recruiting the right people is therefore a challenging process.

Recruiting starts from a careful selection of the applicants' resumes. Remarks which states those kinds of activities participation being a leader of a group or social engagements should be the very first resumes to be selected for an interview round. The interview should be intensive and should include questions, which show the level of soft skills of the applicants. In addition, not only the hard skills to be assessed but the applicants should already be measured of their soft skills competencies during the recruitment process.

2. Selection Process

In the past, candidates possessing outstanding hard skills will be the first one to be selected because they have the know-how and can use their knowledge in their work life right away. However, this kind of selection criteria is not valid in the modern world anymore. The interviewer has to make sure that the successful candidates must be equipped with the right level of soft-skill competencies.

3. Development Process

Identify training needs and objectives specifically for the managerial positions and designing the training to meet those needs are very much vital processes. As stated by Heathfield (2008), training is an important element in creating a high work performance culture. Hence, it is recommended that future training initiatives should include the development of soft skills as identified in this research. The following training courses should be considered; communication skills including all verbal and non-verbal communication, problem solving skills and decision making skills. In addition, nowadays, more and more airlines offer the service excellence courses in order to train their staff to be able to deliver the right service with the right mindset towards the passengers.

4. Promotion Process

Many ways exist to select staff for promotion. However, the company should be aware that soft skills are the most significant skills a manager needs to have apart from his hard-skill competencies. This is because a manager needs to know and work with individual and to lead them in their daily working life. Hence, the selection committee should ensure to include the soft-skill test in their promotion process. Soft skills have to be one of the main criteria for promotion selection to ensure that the right person will be promoted. In this research study, an assessment tool has been developed and tested with a number of entry-level managers. Hence, it is highly recommended to include this assessment into the staff promotion process.

Internal processes are important but the airline company should as well consider to connect themselves to the workforce providers in order to reduce the unsatisfied recruitment. The following recommendations are to be considered:

- In view of the high number of employees needed, the industry should find and establish the education alliances with the educational institutions in order to collaboratively develop the curriculum together.
- Airline companies should take part in outlining student's internship programs to help grooming the students to become desired personnel for the airline industry.
- During and after internship period, the airline companies should be able to measure the training result and identify whether that person is qualified or not as an employee.

Last but not least, it is highly recommended that the soft-skill should not only be assessed during the staff promotion process but it should be as well included in the annual appraisal in order for staff to know the level of their soft-skill competencies and the area where they can and should develop themselves to meet the expectation from the company.

To conclude, in order to meet the needs of the rapidly changing and tremendously growing aviation industry, the educators have to continually investigate which competencies are essential for graduates to possess and promote these skills in their curriculum to meet these needs. In addition, there is as well a need to consider a wide variety of criteria in decision making not only for recruiting staff but also for promoting staff in higher position.

In order to avoid any significant loss in human capital investment and the productivity of the airlines, the present educational solution has to go in line with the international protocol. A shared understanding and commitment between major relevant stakeholders including the education providers, who are the supplier of the workforce to the industry and the airline companies, who are the workforce users in the market, is strongly necessary and very much vital to the business.

5.3.3 Practical Implication for individual graduates

The initial step was to make students aware of the importance of having soft skills and what the consequences were if they did not possess them. They should as well be motivated to enhance their soft skills which could be done by many means such as joining clubs, attending group activities, reading textbooks on this topic, etc.

In addition, the research will assist the individuals to evaluate their strength as well as their weakness in order for them to develop themselves in their career path. It also gives the direction for people to learn how to adapt themselves positively in terms of personality and the way they present themselves which at the end, will lead to their future success in the career.

5.4 The limitation of the research

In spite of the relevant findings already outlined, various limitations still impacted the final outcomes of this study. Considering the unstandardized nature of the interviews, reliability on data gathered may be put in doubt in relation to obtaining similar information from further research (Saunders, et al., 2009). The response bias, based on how the respondents perceive the interviewers, and the interview bias, where the non-verbal communication including tone of voice, body gesture of the interviewers

can also create an effect on the respondents' answers (Saunders, et al., 2009). Hence, it was inevitable to avoid both forms of bias in this research study.

Taken into consideration that the high-level managers of each airline group originating from various parts of the world may have different perceptions towards essential soft skills for career advancement due to the different natures of the work environments in which each type of airline supervisor was expected to perform, and the different types of customer demands they had to meet, the researcher prepared the separate datasheet for each airline group in order to be able to provide the data in comparison among each airline group as per being clarified in chapter 3.

In addition, the researcher was also aware of the discrepancy in the perceptions among airlines in the same group. The consensus rate in AHP model was regularly checked and monitored in order to ensure the certain degree of consensus, which was necessary to derive a meaningful and valid outcome from the group.

In order to avoid the lack of accurate findings and to be able to quantify the subjective input from stakeholders, the multi-criteria decision making approach particularly the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) was brought in to analyse the data in order to rank the top ten most essential soft skills.

One of the possible hinderances could be the understanding of the definition or the defined scope of each soft skill and the perception of each respondent towards each soft skill. For instance, though the researcher clearly explained the definition of each soft skill e.g. negotiation skill etc., the respondent might still not get the sense that the negotiation skill includes various methods of communicating, persuading, influencing, planning and strategizing.

The most obvious limitation of this research study was time. As a matter of fact that the defined scope of work from the beginning was too big and broad, it was very challenging to align each research step with the pre-defined timeline. Specifically, the complex of AHP model, the researcher needed to spend around 15-45 minutes with each respondent in order to facilitate the pairwise method comparison survey. Due to the limited time frame for the research study and the assessment tool development, the researcher decided to re-arrange the timeline of each process by extending the timeline of some activities, which were not on the critical path or did not effect to the duration of the whole research study. One of these activities was the data collection from the

university educators in the first research step as only the data from the high-level airline managers in the first research step would be developed to be the second and the third survey. Another activity was the data collection from the high-level airline managers in the second step as the assessment tool for the third survey was developed from the input of the high-level airline managers in the first step.

5.5 Scope for Future Research

This study was basically a preliminary research to tap into the minds of the airliners at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport and the educators, who offered aviation related programs in universities across Thailand and ascertain the importance of soft skills to the career advancement in Ground Passenger Service. Investigating the ranking of essential soft skills required for career advancement with other techniques might also yield more insight to this topic as well.

In addition, it was recommended that future research should explore the essential soft-skills needed for career advancement in Cabin Passenger Service and promotion decision making process of Flight Attendants as this particular job is widely interested by the new graduates.

Last but not least, with the purpose to have further awareness on this topic, future research is suggested to take place in other countries, where aviation industry is booming and the demand of the skilled labour in the industry is significantly increased. This could enhance the identification of required soft skills by the practitioners as well as the understanding of the academic sector, which will lead to the right skills development and potential savings in the human capital investment and the productivity of airlines.

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