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**The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring
Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of
Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC**

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**The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring
Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of
Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC**

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Declaration

I, Kedist Mekonnen, hereby declare that the work entitled “**The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC**” is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or part submitted at any university for a degree.

Name: Kedist Mekonnen

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Certification

This is to certify that **Kedist Mekonnen** has carried out her research on the topic entitled “**The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC**”. The study is original work and is suitable for submission for the reward Master of Arts in Project Management.

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Approval

This is to Certify that the thesis prepared by Kedist Mekonnen, entitled: “**The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC**”. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Project Management complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards concerning originality and quality.

Submitted by: Kedist Mekonnen Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Abstract

The main objective of this project work was to assess human resource recruitment in acquiring important soft skills in the case of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia plc, the new company with a license to provide telecom service in Ethiopia. Soft skills are unique personal traits like communication and teamwork that are vital for multinational companies to succeed as they expand into different countries in search of new markets. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research methods with observation, questionnaires, and interviews to collect primary data from respondents within the company. A sample of 200 employees was selected for the questionnaire with a response rate of 94.5% and an interview with 5 managers. The result from the project work showed that the most looked for soft skills are communication, team spirit, decision-making ability, cultural awareness, positive attitude, managing emotions, conflict resolution, team building, ability to provide new insights and problem-solving skills. The perception of employees and managers towards soft skills is promising and it leads to enhancement of the skills by training and close management follow-up. In addition, based on the findings, it is recommended to bridge cultural differences among employees, analysis of complex problems can be achieved by breaking down of problems and situations and culture of on-job trainings must be strengthened. Generally, it is very important for managers' to closely follow up and give guidance to identify soft skills and the training for the enhancement of soft skills must be strengthened.

Keywords: soft skills, project, project environment, project success

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This section is an overall introduction to the topic of the role of human resource recruitment in acquiring important soft skills for project success. It includes a background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, the scope of the study, limitation, and definition of key terms of the project work.

1.1 Background of the Study

Industries like Information Communications Technology (ICT) and telecommunications are always on a run for growth and are keen on a country's development. Governments are investing huge amounts in telecommunication infrastructure to equip them with the latest technologies (Madden, 2000). The industry is ever-growing with huge opportunities to create jobs and improve people's lives. Due to the connectivity telecom creates, businesses can improve links with suppliers and clients (World Bank, 2006).

Telecommunication (telecom) companies mostly have project environments that are vastly different from other work environments due to the unique characteristics of the projects (Beers, 2021). Cooperation and a full set of skills are required from project teams to produce specified and unique results within a known time and a controlled budget. To have the intended outcomes of a specific telecom project, the team members of projects must have the skills necessary to carry out tasks (Ludovico, 2010).

Employers look for two types of skills: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are educated or trained skills that are needed to perform a specific line of work. They are easily identified as it involves a degree or certificate to know if the employee has the skills or not (Doyle, 2021). These skills boost the employees' productivity and efficiency to perform the job. Hard skills can be gained by education, training, reading,

practice, and instructions. Some examples include a degree of education in the specific field, additional training, and years of experience in that field. (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017)

On the other hand, soft skills usually referred to as “people skills” are an individual’s traits. These skills are hard to quantify or to be backed up with tangible proof that an individual got them. It focuses more on who people are, rather than what they know (Doyle, 2021). It makes the work environment too flexible and easier to manage through subtle behaviors and communication. According to Anupama (2017), it includes attributes like adaptability and flexibility, and it also includes problem-solving, creative thinking, conflict resolution, time management, and self-motivation.

There are obvious changes in our world; we are being technologically advanced in every way. As technology improves, and globalization takes over, the chance of interaction between cultures is inevitable (Connell, Gough, McDonnell, & Burgess, 2014). This creates an opportunity for people to interact globally across many cultures, demographics, age groups, gender, and others. Therefore, needs special skills to interact with each other. Possessing only hard skills is no longer enough for employees nowadays (Mitchell, 2008).

In the process of hiring an individual, employers can differentiate qualifiers for a job opening by the soft skills they possess. As most candidates might have the same hard skill qualifications, these behaviors, personal qualities, and attitudes complemented other technical skill sets they have (Doyle, 2021). Some common soft skills are a positive attitude, teamwork, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, communication skills, work ethic, time management, decision making, conflict resolution, problem-solving, negotiation skills, empathy, creativity, social skills, and adaptability (Lippman, Ryberg, Carny, & Moore, 2015).

This study was designed to investigate the role of Human Resource recruitment in acquiring important soft skills for the future success of the company and try to identify which soft skills are more relevant. The study also tried to assess the perception of

employees and management towards soft skills. In addition, enhancement of these skills was examined in the sample company, Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC (STEP).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Our country Ethiopia is the fastest growing economy in its region with 6.1% growth in the 2019/2020 fiscal year (World Bank, 2021). But the country has been closed to the outside market in most sectors including telecommunications. Ethio telecom, a government organization, has been the sole provider of telecom services starting from 1952 and provides all telecom services to the Ethiopian people. Currently, the company provides the latest technology, Long Term Evolution (LTE) advanced in selected areas of Addis Ababa and now introducing 5G in selected areas of Addis Ababa (Ethio telecom, 2022).

A license to work as a network provider is awarded in Ethiopia, inspired by the objectives of the Government's 10-year development plan, Digital Ethiopia Strategy 2025 (CEPHEUS, 2019). To contribute to the country's digital transformation and inclusion for Ethiopians, new entrants are believed to add value to the significant decision by the Government to liberalize the telecommunications sector and open the market to foreign investment (Sumitomo, 2021).

Due to the need to "digitize" Ethiopia, a new telecom company was invited to provide telecom service. In May 2021, the government of Ethiopia announced that an operating license was given to an international consortium named the Global Partnership for Ethiopia. The partners in the consortium are led by Safaricom Plc, a partner member of the Vodafone Group, and established a new operating company in Ethiopia which aims to start providing telecommunications services in 2022. In addition to Safaricom, the partnership includes Vodacom Group; Vodafone Group; Sumitomo Corporation – one of the largest international trading and business investment companies; and

Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC Group plc)- the UK's development finance institution and impact investor.” (Safaricom, 2021)

The current employees of the company STEP are from the group companies, local staff hiring is still in progress. Bringing employees from such a huge group of companies to one country enables a large number of workforces to move in. Each group company has its structure and employees have different backgrounds. Working in this diversified work environment induces huge opportunities for learning and experience as well as for the company as a whole. Each department's team is equipped with technical staff with vast experience and knowledge. But each individual possesses his/her traits or characteristics that make them unique. These traits are what are called soft skills, the ideal skills that make them capable of the task they are assigned to this diversified project environment.

As the business progresses, hiring from the local workforce was very mandatory for the company. Local hires are the key to any foreign company as they have first-hand knowledge and experience of the market. There was a flow of applicants to any opening STEP had to announce. Most of them are with impressive educational backgrounds and vast experience. The human resources (HR) team had to differentiate the right candidates by the unique soft skills they have.

The reason why we need to know about the soft skills of employees is that it accelerates business and career progression. Most managers think that soft skills are very essential for hiring decisions. An employee's promotions and signs of progress are most often occurred due to this unique trait (Indeed, 2020). In this competitive world, whereby technology is taking over, human-level skill has a vital factor in organizational success (Barnard, 2019). As an example, an analysis by DeakinCo., (2017) in Australia shows that by 2030, soft skill-intensive jobs will be around two-thirds of all jobs.

A study by LinkedIn, (2019) (a social network that focuses on professional networking and career development), showed that out of the thousands of job postings, there is an increasing demand from companies looking for specific soft skills rather than looking

for degrees and certificates. But these skills are not being enhanced for the young generation at a university level. Leading to a knowledge gap in the workforce in recent years. The skills are needed but employees don't know if they have got the skills or how exactly to use them to succeed. (Petroni, 2018)

Previous studies stated that soft skills increase innovation, productivity, and creativity (Balcar, 2016). Ignoring the direct impact of soft skills in project success to allocate project resources could result in companies spending more time and resources on projects, affecting team dynamics, and missing deadlines. In the end, the project's success is directly influenced by how collaborative the project team could be when led by its project manager (Čech & Chadt, 2015).

This project work assessed how STEP identifies the ideal candidates out of what is on the market to have a successful operation. This helps to explore how soft skills are being used to uniquely identify employees' capability to have a successful career and great contributors to the company.

1.3 Research questions

Based on the problems stated above, this project work attempted to answer the following research questions.

- How do soft skills determine the performance of employees?
- What is the perception of managers and employees towards soft skills?
- How do companies enhance employees' soft skills?
- Which soft skills are the most looked-for for employees in a project environment?

1.4 Research objectives

The general objective of this project work was to examine the role of human resource in employees' soft skills to enhance the performance of employees in a project environment for the success of a project.

Specific objectives

To achieve the broad objectives presented in section 1.4, the study considers the following specific objectives.

- To assess how soft skills determine the performance of employees.
- To investigate the perception of managers and employees toward soft skills.
- To examine how companies enhance employees' soft skills.
- To determine which soft skills are a must-have in a diversified project environment.

1.5 Significance of the study

In addition to the above-stated problems, the following facts helped the study to focus on the importance of soft skills. The first is that previously the role of soft skills in workplace success and achievement has been poorly explored. This project work helps to improve the understanding of all parties involved like, employers, project managers, team leaders, and employees towards the benefits of soft skills.

Second, the findings of this project work directly benefit the company to focus on how to use the soft skills of employees for future success, emphasize the importance of soft skills for a successful project outcome in a diversified project environment and to use the contribution of soft skills in determining the performance of an employee.

Third, the study is also beneficial to the government to consider the use of soft skills in their policy statement by government organizations and their employees. Finally, the findings of this project work are useful for students and researchers in their academic writings. On top of this, the study can serve as a springboard for those who are interested to extend it for further investigation in depth.

1.6 Scope of the study

The scope of this project work was limited to exploring how Human Resource acquires employees' soft skills that are important to achieve the company's goal of STEP. The project work collected primary data from and within this specific company. Although it would have been great to explore other companies and industries as a comparison, the project work is only about this company. In addition, as the company is new entrant to Ethiopia's market, the "performance" element of the study is based on perception not actual result.

1.7 Limitation of the study

This project work was conducted to determine how human resource recruitment in acquiring soft skills contributes to success in a project environment. These skills are intangible and hard to determine which leads to managers and employees not giving much attention to them. It is a broad subject but not yet explored as needed. For the researcher, finding previous research on this specific subject was a challenge.

Furthermore, the sample employees are going to be from within STEP. They mostly are technological people which diminished the broadness of the study. This limitation was challenged by interviewing and giving questionnaires to as many employees as possible to include mixed opinions of the employees. In addition, time constraints were the major factor affecting the quality of research work.

1.8 Organization of the study

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction to the study. Concepts and literature related to the study are reviewed in chapter two. Chapter three constitutes the research methodology with research type, data collection, and analysis. Chapter four is a discussion of the results. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are incorporated in chapter five.

1.9 Definition of terms

Project: a project is a combination of related activities undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects can be handled by one department or as an organization as a whole. The project has a specific objective and it is constrained by time, scope, and resources.

Telecom: telecom is short for telecommunications. It is enabling the communication of parties regardless of distance using electric signals and waves of electromagnets. Telecom companies transmit data in the form of audio, video, and text around the world.

Hard skills are specific skills, knowledge, and abilities to do a specific job. These skills are learned and people can get a certificate for recognition of completion. Hard skills are very crucial because they are widely used in hiring and job search.

Soft skills: are personal skills or traits to perform interpersonal activities. These qualities of a person are hard to measure and quantify therefore it needs careful observation. Soft skills are not limited to a field of study rather they are global to all jobs.

Project environment: the external and internal factors affecting the project. The environment influences the outcome of the project causing alterations to the scope, budget, and time. Careful handling of the environment leads to the success of the project.

A successful project outcome is when all or most of the project goals are met. This requires thorough hard work from all project teams as well as communication with all stakeholders and risk management.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents background information on soft skills and project success to make the subject matter easy to understand. This section also provides an overview of major findings in the subject matter to see the connection with previous theories and concepts. The researcher explored previous studies and documents to be able to fill the gap.

2.1 Theoretical review

2.1.1. Project environment

A project environment is where the project is taking place. It is all the internal and external factors that put their hand on the project directly or indirectly that can impact the project dimensions (Landau, 2021). These factors are operational, social, cultural, economic, financial, organizational, ecological, organizational structure and company culture, legal, political, technological, and others. Project managers and all team members must understand and plan to manage all the factors that affect the project as part of risk management work (Litten, 2020).

The project environment check takes place before the beginning of the project. This helps them to identify project stakeholders and what exactly they expect from the project. Project stakeholders can be internal (from within the project like the team members and project managers) and external (factors like government laws and regulations). Stakeholders can also be active (frequent participation in the project) or passive (stakeholders that view the project from afar) (Wideman, 1990).

2.1.2. Common job skills

Getting the right employees with the right skills at the right time is vital for the success of any organization (Taylor, E. 2016). For jobs that require formal education, university

graduates with degrees must have the basic skills that help them to achieve in the sector and profession they choose to work in. Some industry-specific skills and skills are shared by all kinds of industries employees work in (Royo 2019).

According to the *indeed website*, an American online job search engine, success in any industry requires a person to be competent and possess behaviors that are essential for successful operation. There are key employability skills that can make anyone effective at any work given. They are called “transferable skills”, they are developed over some time and grow as a person’s career develops. Even if that person changes industry or career, these skills were still be used and they grow as years of experience increase (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020).

Transferable skills are various abilities, knowledge, and behaviors that can apply to any type of work (Chand & Tipnis, 2016). Most soft skills are transferable because they are related to general work habits and your attitude toward coworkers and clients. Transferable skills such as teamwork and strategic thinking are highly flexible and can be a benefit in your job regardless of the environment. Since no two jobs are the same, employers seek out candidates with transferable skills because they show that the applicant is flexible and adaptable. (Duszyński, 2022)

2.1.3. Soft skills

According to Project Management Book of Knowledge, (2008), soft skills are interpersonal skills that are particularly important to team development. Project teams can greatly reduce problems and increase cooperation by understanding the sentiments of project team members, anticipating their actions, acknowledging their concerns, and following up on their issues. Skills such as empathy, influence, creativity, and group facilitation are valuable assets when managing the project team.

Soft skills are intangible, but they are utterly expressive. They are not measured but felt. Unlike managing organizational structure, it deals with managing organizational behavior and the outlook of key persons associated with a task. Soft skills, therefore

define a manager's skills in fostering inter and intra-organizational relationships amongst all types of people associated with the project (Kirsch, 2000).

Soft skills refer to a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. These skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills (Laura, Renee, Rachel, & Moore, 2015).

“Soft skills” are centrally important for human capital development and workforce success. A growing evidence base shows that these qualities rival academic or technical skills in their ability to predict employment and earnings, among other outcomes (Tim, James, Ron, Weel, & Borghans, 2014).

A person's soft skill is an important part of their contribution to the success of an organization. Particularly those organizations dealing with customers face-to-face are generally more successful if they train their staff to use these skills. Screening or training for personal habits or traits such as dependability and conscientiousness can yield a significant return on investment for an organization. For this reason, soft skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualifications (Chand & Tipnis, 2016).

2.1.3.1. Soft skills in project management

According to Pant & Baroudi, (2008), “project management discipline still appears to place greater emphasis on hard skills at the expense of the softer human skills”. The issue of not including soft skills within the project management education should be solved because soft skills lay the groundwork for a transformational leader, versus a transactional leader. Project management is viewed as the ‘new’ form of general management which enables organizations to integrate, plan, and control schedule-intensive and one-of-a-kind endeavors to improve overall organizational performance and should be cultivated with an education that includes both technical and human skills.

The education of soft skills should be integrated into project management education because of the forced relationships needed to complete projects. Project managers must delegate and interact with the stakeholders and internal personnel to ensure the project holds to the triple constraint scope, budget, and schedule (Hannah, 2016).

Numerous studies have shown that the core skills for any successful project manager are the ability to develop a successful ‘high performing’ team and communicate effectively to influence key stakeholders. These soft skills are very hard to achieve competence in (Abyad, 2013).

2.1.3.2.List of soft skills

A study by EL-Sabaa, (2001) looks at soft skills (human skills) from the perspective of a project leader. He states the skill sets that should be possessed by the project manager are mobilizing, communication skills, coping with situations, delegating authority, displaying political sensitivity, maintaining high self-esteem, and demonstrating enthusiasm.

Another study by Hannah (2016), stated that the soft skills that apply directly to project management and the success of the project and project team are communication, conflict management, and emotional intelligence.

According to Laura, Renee, Rachel, & Moore (2015), there are five most critical soft skills to bring success across all outcomes and which employers expect employees to have: Social Skills, Communication, and higher-order thinking skills (including problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making), are supported by the intrapersonal skills of self-control and positive self-concept.

Social skills help people get along well with others. This ability includes respecting others, using context-appropriate behavior, and resolving conflict. Social skills are universally important. They predict all four types of workforce outcomes which are: employment, performance, income/wages, and entrepreneurial success.

Communication skills refer to the specific types of communication used in the workplace and include oral, written, non-verbal, and listening skills. Strong general communication skills contribute to the development of other soft skills, like social skills.

Higher-order thinking consists of problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. At a basic level, this includes an ability to identify an issue and take in information from multiple sources to evaluate options to reach a reasonable conclusion.

Self-control refers to one's ability to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, and regulate behaviors. Self-control is an intrapersonal skill, foundational to many others: it enables successful decision-making, resolution of conflict, and coherent communication.

A positive self-concept includes self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well-being and pride. Positive self-concept is another intrapersonal skill that is important for workforce success.



Figure 1 The five critical skills (Laura, Renee, Rachel, & Moore (2015))

Based on the study by Chand & Tipnis, (2016), the below are additional soft skills needed:

Conflict management: should be one of the qualities of any project manager. To solve any problem, there should be openness between parties, resolution focus on issues, and resolution focus on the present, not the past. Techniques include; withdrawing or

avoiding the conflict, smoothing or accommodating between parties, making compromises, forcing the decision of one party over the other, collaborating to create a permanent solution, and confronting or problem-solving of the parties.

Coaching: a project manager must be able to be competent so that he can make his team competent to perform well in the project.

Negotiation and team-building: These skills need more personal involvement from a Project Manager than just focusing on output. Better relationship with the team & other stakeholders creates a positive environment towards successful execution of the project. All other skills like Communication, Trust Building, Conflict Management, Influencing helps in doing better negotiation & team building activities.

Decision Making: A decision by organizations management gives birth to a new project. Facing challenges, finding options, deciding to go with one particular option are part and parcel of a Project Managers day-to-day life. Decisions of a Project Manager at each level affects the project outcome.

Political & Cultural Awareness: The Project Management need to create awareness about the organizational politics & use it appropriately for project success. With increase in global projects, it is inevitable for PMs to understand the cultural differences in the team around the world and work with them accordingly.

Self-Management Skills: Self-Management Skills address how people perceive themselves and others, manage your emotions, and react to adverse situations. Only when one builds an inner excellence can he/she have a strong mental and emotional foundation to succeed in their career.

Growth mindset: looking at any situation, especially difficult situations, as an opportunity for an individual to learn, grow, and change for the better. Focusing one's attention on improving instead of changing others or blaming anyone.

Self-awareness: knowing and understanding what drives, angers, motivates, embarrasses, frustrates, and inspires themselves. Being able to observe oneself

objectively in a difficult situation and understand how your perceptions of oneself, others, and the situation are driving their actions.

Emotion regulation: being able to manage emotions, especially negative ones, at work (e.g., anger, frustration, embarrassment) so people can think clearly and objectively, and act accordingly.

Self-confidence: is believing in oneself and their ability to accomplish anything. Knowing that all you need is within you now.

Stress management: being able to stay healthy, calm, and balanced in any challenging situations. Knowing how to reduce stress level increases productivity, prepare people for new challenges and supports physical and emotional health, all of which are needed for a fulfilling, successful career.

Resilience: being able to bounce back after a disappointment or set back, big or small, and continue to move onward and upward.

Skills to forgive and forget: being able to forgive oneself for making a mistake, forgive others that wronged us, and move on without “mental or emotional baggage.” Freeing one’s mind from the past so they can focus 100% of their mental energy on the near and long-term career goals.

Persistence and perseverance: being able to maintain the same energy and dedication in the effort to learn, do, and achieve in one’s career despite difficulties, failures, and oppositions.

Patience: being able to step back in a seemingly rushed or crisis situation, so an individual can think clearly and take action that fulfills their long-term goals.

Perceptiveness: giving attention and understanding to the unspoken cues and underlying nuance of other people’s communication and actions. Often times, people are too busy thinking about themselves and what they are saying, they leave little room

to watch and understand others action and intentions.

2.1.3.3. Soft skills and performance

Researchers Bancino & Zevalkink (2007) found that the focus of education and training is on technical topics and mathematics, science, and technical skills, yet the fast-paced, global marketplace of today is demanding more. Technical professionals in disciplines such as information technology, engineering, architecture, and research and development are increasingly required to broaden their skill sets to master the soft skills.

The skills gap that has employers worried isn't the technical skills gap, but the soft skills gap. Senior management complain about the lack of soft skills in new employees and emphasize that knowledge alone is not enough to succeed, but that effective communication also influences success (Klaus, 2010). The practical importance of soft skills has been amply illustrated through research attempting to define factors related to project and project management success (Stevenson & Starkweather, 2010).

In the past 20 years, due to globalization and modernization, the work environment has changed. In order to be successful in this dynamic environment, the need for soft skills is increasing (Balcar, 2016). Soft skills are increasingly becoming indispensable in the success of any profession. Employers are complaining about the lack of required soft skills in the employees that hinder them to achieve excellence in employability skills (Sharvari & Kulkarni, 2019). However, a gap in soft skills has been pointed out by employers globally who reported that there is a lack of qualified candidates regarding soft skills in order to fill the available positions (Manpower Group, 2013).

In this competitive environment, job performance has continuously remained an important issue in many organizations. The job performance of a leader indicates how well a leader accomplishes his job responsibilities in the working environment in order to achieve organizational goals and productivity (Campbell, 1990). Soft skills have a substantial influence on the accomplishment of job performance, and therefore soft skills are necessary for organizational success and wellbeing (Seetha, 2014).

To achieve a high work performance culture, an organization must provide its employees training and development programs designed specifically to build and change their attitudes and/or behaviors towards several organizational functions (Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin, & Bakare, 2017). Recent developments in the interest in soft skill competencies appeared to be connected to work success. It is no wonder, then, that organizations are more willing to invest in soft skills development for better work performance, especially at top executive levels (Homer, 2001).

A study by (Ibrahim, Boerhannoeddin, & Bakare, 2017) indicated a positive relationship between soft skills, soft skills development by employers and work performance. They stated that, both soft skills and training methodology appear to play an important role in employees' performance. Work performance of employees are predicted by soft skills and the training methodology adopted. It might be expected that the training methodology has an impact on the employees' transfer of the soft skills acquired during the training to their job, which invariably improves work performance on their job.

2.1.3.4. Enhancing soft skills

The kinds of soft skills needed by employers might differ by the type of job a person acquires. For example, while being able to check the vitals for a patient is a necessary skill for a nurse, communication and compassion are just as important to a successful nursing career. When those soft skills are in short supply, consumer and customer satisfaction drops rapidly. Enhancement of soft skills by employers by techniques like training helps organizations achieve their missions by improving interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, communication and presentation skills, negotiation abilities, business etiquette, leadership skills and self-awareness (Jessica, 2019).

Because most people lack awareness of which areas they need to work on, self-awareness is one of the best soft skills to train for early on in a training program.

Training in the areas of different soft skills apply to most industries, but the exact soft skills required by each organization understandably varies. A sales rep may need more communication and negotiation training than an IT professional. Before designing or purchasing a soft skills training course, employers should consider what skills impact their organization the most (Jessica, 2019).

According to Emanuel, Ricchiardi, Sanseverino, & Ghislieri, (2021) Soft skills enhancement tends to be less involved than developing hard skills all that's needed is a little time, reliable internet access, and a willing team. Most soft-skills training is conducted through digital learning platforms, allowing employees to complete training on their own schedule. Employees need not read through endless pages of dry material, either.

Micro learning breaks information down into small, digestible learning elements, making it easier to pick up new skills quickly and without mental fatigue. The ease and convenience of online learning allows employers to improve the effectiveness of their team as painlessly as possible. As a bonus, soft skill training provides employees with the opportunity to develop the skills they may need for that next promotion (Emanuel, Ricchiardi, Sanseverino, & Ghislieri, 2021).

While soft skills training is a relatively new practice, it's a mutually beneficial investment to a business and its employees. For a business, adding soft skills courses to employee training programs helps to prevent common productivity killers like miscommunication, ineffective problem solving, and poor management of projects and time. Before hiring new talent, companies must consider giving existing members of their team the coaching they need to deliver the results both employer and employee can be proud of. For employees, they're given the opportunity to validate or improve upon their soft skill abilities (Jessica, 2019).

On an article by Apostolopoulos (2020), below are the ways to develop soft skills in the workplace: enhancing soft skills is a process because employees must first engage in a little self-reflection before they know which soft skills training, they need. This can

be tough but also rewarding. How to develop soft skills at work in 6 simple steps:

1. Develop a learning mindset: Developing soft skills like resilience, emotional intelligence, and agility is a great way to make the workforce change-ready. As Sandra Kelly, UK Director at industry-led skills expert, People 1st International, says: “Resilience, agility, and cultural intelligence have become increasingly important as survival skills in business. Rather than soft skills – these should be deemed essential skills. They are what set you apart and how you manage yourself, and others, in an ever-changing workplace. The awareness of these skills has risen with the emergence of a more emotionally aware and intuitive workforce with a higher level of compassion and care for others. As a result, the mind-set of management is changing, and more value is being placed on these skills.”

2. Encourage self-reflection: employers or employees won't know how to improve or develop soft skills in the workplace until they know which soft skills need improvement. So, before employers start assigning courses to employees, it's essential to figure out which soft skills development training each employee needs most.

3. Expand knowledge and understanding: Sometimes, all it takes is a little guidance to get employees to realize that they aren't as sociable, communicative, or positive as they could be. Seminars and training programs offered at local events or conventions can prove great when teaching employees what soft skills development is and why it matters.

4. Online trainings or using software: There's no reason to visit a physical location especially now that it's more or less impossible when your employees can learn from anywhere. Due to availability of internet all over the world, soft skills training courses can be accessible, engaging, and fun no matter where your learners are or what device they're using.

5. Provide opportunities for practice: Practice is the best way for employees to develop soft skills. After all, it would be pointless to develop employees' collaboration skills and then isolate their work responsibilities. Instead, give them the opportunity to take

their newly acquired soft skills for a test drive.

6. Offer feedback: Once employees are on track towards developing their soft skills in the workplace, the best way for the employer to help them as a leader or manager is by offering periodic feedback. Soft skills development is an incredibly slow process because it requires a change of personality and habit, rather than a change of knowledge. So, employers must gently guide their employees down the right path and don't punish them when they veer away every now and then. After some time, they should be well on their way towards possessing a set of powerful soft skills.

2.1.3.5.Perception towards soft skills

There are several theoretical perceptions of soft skills that are investigated and discussed by different researchers. For instance, (Marando, 2012) discussed skills as it relates to project management and concluded that interpersonal skills such as: leadership skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, influencing skills, problem-solving skills and decision-making skills, are the most essential soft skills for project managers.

Rao (2013) looked into soft skills from the perspective of leadership and listed several soft skills that are essential for leaders such as: critical thinking skills, communication skills, conceptual skills, problem-solving skills, conflict management skills, team building skills etc. A researcher named Sloane (2011) investigated soft skills in relation to innovation and concluded that soft skills such as: passion and optimism, tolerance for uncertainty, entrepreneurial orientation, relationship building and maintenance, strategic in communication skills and quick study, are essential for innovation. The differences and similarities between these perspectives of soft skills is due to their different focuses and purposes.

A study was conducted by Tsirkas, Chytiri, & Bouranta (2020) showed a gap between employees' and their subsequent employers' perceptions of employees' soft skills. Employees seem to regard their skills more highly than do their employers, whereas

employers seem to consider employees as not properly equipped with the necessary soft skills. These findings are a worrying sign for business operations and suggest that difficulties in manager–employee co-operation can arise.

Another study by Taylor (2016) show that stakeholders feel that soft skills of students are not developed adequately, that there is some uncertainty about who should be responsible for developing soft skills, and that the development of soft skills is seen as a difficult task. A list is compiled of the most important soft skills according to literature, lecturers, industry, and students. This list can be used in further research on the soft skills of IT-students. Recommendations are made for the teaching and learning of soft skills (Taylor, 2016).

According to a study by Robles (2012), executives overwhelmingly indicated that integrity and communication are the top two soft skills needed by employees in today's workplace. The sample executive personnel on the study indicated that integrity and communication were very important or extremely important. Over three fourths indicated that courtesy was an extremely important skill, and over half reported that responsibility and interpersonal skills were extremely important.

Robles, (2012) also suggested that out of the important soft skills for employees Communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork and work ethic are the most important.

2.2. Empirical review

A study by Singh P. J., (2018), was designed to assess the level of soft skills possessed by new business graduates who had been employed no longer than two years. The subjects were 154 new business graduates during the 2014-2015 academic year in Southern Minnesota.

The conclusion from this study implied that, soft skills are needed apart from technical skills in order to be successful. The study also indicated that top performers possess

attributes such as creativity, innovation, and emotional intelligence. But the study failed to conclude about significance difference among preferred soft skills for new hires across business sectors due to lack of respondents from different business sectors.

Another study by Suleman, Syed, & Ahmed, (2021) examined the association between soft skills and job performance among secondary-school-heads in Kohat Division, Pakistan. A sample of 117 out of 197 secondary-school-heads were used. The conclusion of this study implied that; male school-heads possess more soft skills as compared to female ones. The study showed it is obvious that both male and female heads have the same capability in these six dimensions of soft skills: communication skills, enthusiasm, flexibility, teamwork, willing to learn and empathy.

Another similar phenomenological study by Millhollan, (2015) about the role of soft skills and hard skills in IT centric project environments using comparative focus group design showed the same. According to the results of the study, discussion with peers, facilitation skills, leadership skills and individual personality traits are key soft skills for project managers. Additionally, results showed that there are skill that don't vary among various industries.

According to Awan, Kashif, & Zulqarnain (2015), on a study done on impact of soft skills of project managers and project success by gathering the views of 178 individuals of project managers.

The researchers come up with the below conceptual framework, confirming that soft skills of project managers lead to project success, team work being a mediator. This study suggests various soft leadership skills, which if properly exercised by the project managers, lead to successful completion of the projects and ultimate beneficiary is the organization.

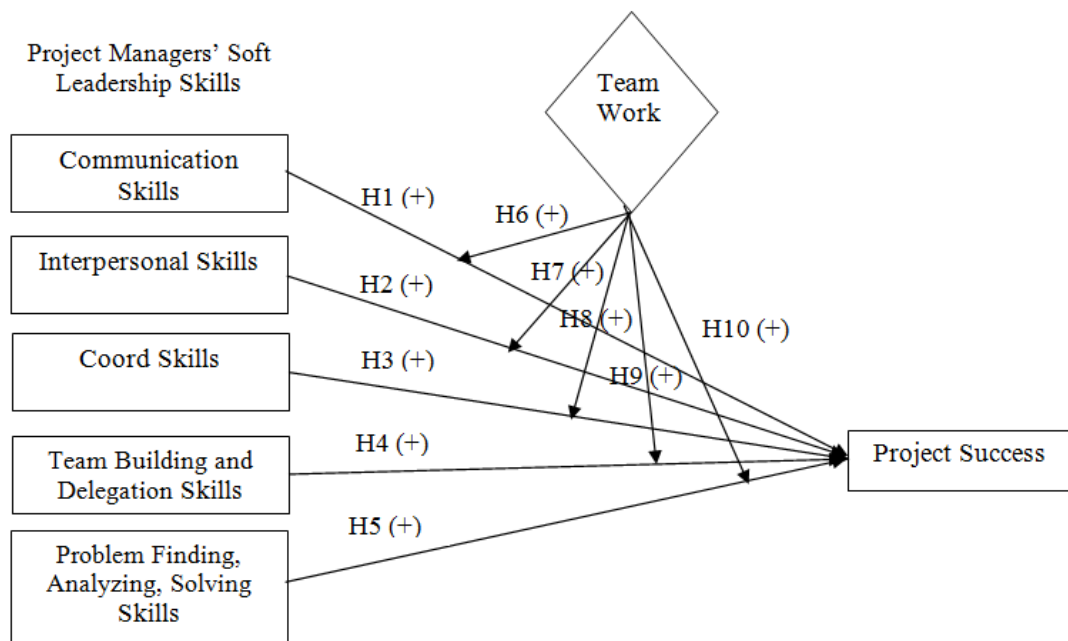


Figure 2. Conceptual framework: (Awan, Kashif, & Zulqarnain (2015))

Enhancement of soft skills in college students as studied by Parker, (2019), collected data of 29 deans of colleges of liberal arts. Concluded that, even if training of soft skills is very difficult and varies from place to place, it is a must especially for students-soon to be employees by various companies. The study identified some core items of soft skill training by colleges one of them is to lead the charge, which means assigning someone to be champion from all parts of the university to drive the college's soft skills initiative from year to year. Another one is commitment of institutions to plan, train and fund human resources to be dedicated for development of soft skills. Evaluation and goal-setting in addition to changing the plans to action are also the key items to be considered.

2.3. Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, the researcher come up with the below conceptual framework. The common soft skills needed by the companies and employees lead to good performance by employee which are enhanced by companies and employees' self-development. The outcome is achievement of project goals set by the company. This in turn, leads to success of employee and managers to enable the company to become

successful.

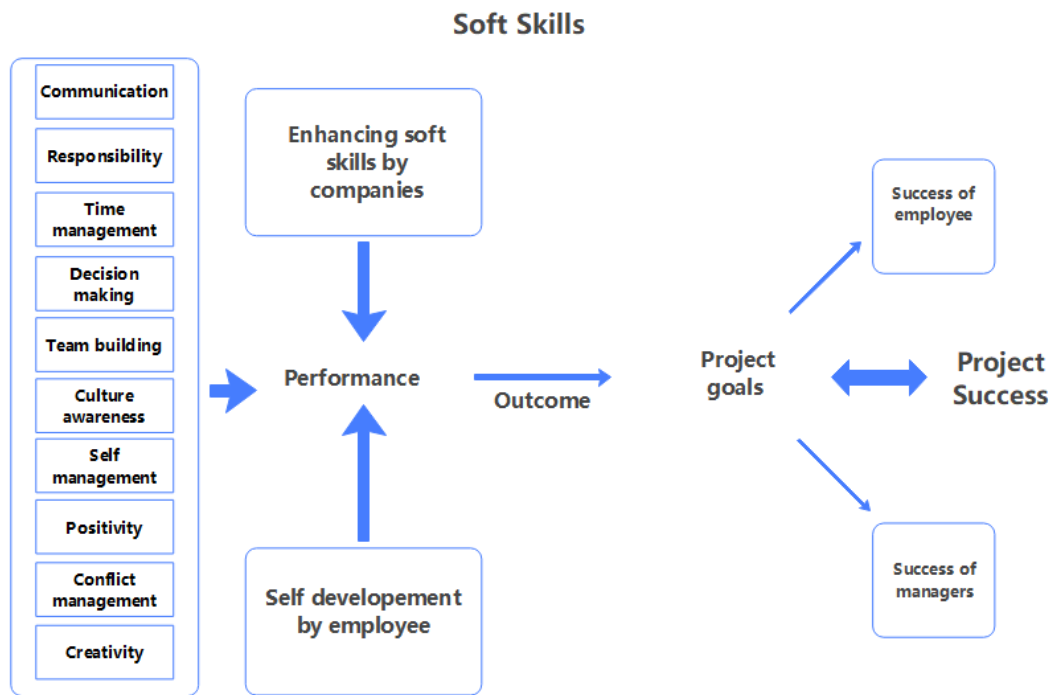


Figure 3. Conceptual framework (source: developed by the researcher)

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design and methodology that were used on the project study. It describes how the research was conducted based on the objective of the study. It includes research and sampling design, study population, unit of analysis, sampling technique, data collection tools and techniques and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research design

A research design is a conceptual structure that shows how all the major parts of the research project come together. It is the framework of research methods and techniques chosen by a researcher. According to (Kothari & Garg, 2019), a research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection and measurement and it is a tool to establish substantive evidence for the claims. It defines the kind of research approach a researcher uses to choose the kind of data that is going to be analyzed. It can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Jansen & Warren, 2020).

Qualitative research is concerned with the qualitative phenomenon, i.e., phenomena relating to or involving quality or kind. Quantitative research, on the other hand, is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It applies to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity (Harwell, 2011). To get the best of both methods, this project work used a third option that consists of both qualitative and quantitative called triangulation, in ways that ostensibly bridge their differences in addressing a research question.

The project work was cross-sectional in the sense that all relevant data were collected at a single point in time. A cross-sectional study is preferred because of the large nature of the study and the limitation of time. According to (Kothari & Garg, 2019), the survey method gathers data from a relatively large number of cases at a particular time; it is essentially cross-sectional.

In this study, the type of research was descriptive research design. It is a type of research that describes a phenomenon through identifying and obtaining information on the characteristics of a particular issue (Mohamed, A. 2010). The rationale for selecting this type of research was that, the study was expected to have no control over the variables; rather it was designed and utilized to give answers to the above research questions.

3.2. Sampling Design

A sample design is a definite plan for obtaining a sample from a given population. It refers to the technique or the procedure the researcher would adopt in selecting items for the sample. While developing a sampling design, the researcher must pay attention to the following points: the population, sampling units or the unit of analysis, sources and tools of data collection, and the sampling techniques (Kothari & Garg, 2019). The sampling design of this project work is presented as below:

3.2.1. Study Population

Population is an important factor for consideration in survey studies. Population is the group or aggregate that the researcher is dealing with from which one wishes to generalize the results of the research study (Poweel & Silipigni, 2004). The population for this study were employees of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia Plc.

In order to bring transformation in the Ethiopian market, Safaricom is hiring local and foreign workforce. Up to the month of May 2022, 202 expats and 210 local hires teamed up to become part of the company and the company plans to fill 1000 local hires by July. The company band structure is classified into four bands of levels junior, senior, management (heads of departments) and executive committee. Based on employees' positions, there are 124 juniors, 215 seniors, 60 managers and 13 executive committees.

3.2.2. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the major entity that is being analyzed in a study; it is the ‘what’ or ‘who’ that is being understudied. In this study, individuals are the unit of analysis.

3.2.3. Sources and Tools of Data collection

The study relied on both quantitative and qualitative data. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the study. Primary data was collected through Observations, survey questionnaires, and interviews.

Questionnaire: In this study, semi-structured questionnaires were used to develop solicit ideas related to the research objective from respondents. The questionnaire was designed on Google form and distributed through electronic media mainly email.

Observations: The observation method is the most commonly used especially in studies relating to behavioral sciences. Under the observation method, the information is sought by way of the investigator’s direct observation without asking from the respondent. Because this study is about the importance of soft skills, usually referred to as “people skills” which are personal traits of an individual is behavioral, it was suitable to use the observational method of data collection.

Interview: This is the most common format of data collection in qualitative research. According to (Oakley, 1998), the qualitative interview is a type of framework in which the practices and standards be not only recorded but also achieved, challenged, and as well as reinforced. It was important to generate detailed information on major issues for triangulation with quantitative ones. In this project work, the researcher used a focused unstructured interview type in which the interviewer is well aware of the respondent, and in times of deviating away from the main issue, the interviewer generally refocuses the respondent toward a key subject called issues of the research topic. According to (Kuzel, 1992) in unstructured interview questions, a minimum sample size of 5 is required. Accordingly, in this project work, the researcher expected

to have five interviews with managers and head of departments.

Secondary Data: these includes all types of published and unpublished, public or private documents and others such as books, documents, journals, articles, different past researches, reports, and online material.

3.2.4. Sampling Techniques

This refers to the number of items to be selected from the universe (population) to constitute a sample which should neither be excessively large, nor too small. It should be optimum. An optimum sample is one which fulfills the requirements of efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility. There are lot of techniques which help us to gather sample depending upon the need and situation (Singh S. , 2018).

The study primarily focuses on a telecommunication company called Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia Plc. Currently the company have a total of 412 number of employees where 202 of them are expatriates and the remaining 210 are local employees. In order to undertake this project work, the sampling frame for the study was 412 from which a sample of n-size were selected by using systematic random sampling technique.

Determining the appropriate sample size is important in research undertaking. Thus, sample size depends on the total number of populations, the level of confidence and the degree of variability in a true population that can be tolerated in the study. Depending on this, there are various sample size estimation methods (Glenn D. Israel, 2003).

For Population that is large or infinite, (Cochran, 1963)develops a formula to yield a representative sample for proportions.

$$n_o = \frac{z^2pq}{e^2} \quad \text{where } n_o = \text{sample size for infinite population}$$

z = the desired confidence level

e = level of precision

p = estimated proportion of an attribute in the population

$$q = 1-p$$

For a large or infinite population where we do not know the variability in the proportion that adopts the practice; therefore, we took the maximum variability $p=0.5$. Furthermore, suppose we desire a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ precision. The resulting sample size for a large or infinite population is (Cochran, 1963)

$$n_o = \frac{z^2pq}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16 \approx 385$$

Since the population for this study is relatively small the sample size can be reduced slightly by using population correction factor according to the following formula below

$$n = \frac{n_o}{1 + \left(\frac{n_o - 1}{N}\right)} \quad \text{Where } n_o = \text{the sample size for large or infinite population}$$

n = Sample size for the study and,

N = the population under the study

$$n = \frac{385}{1 + \left(\frac{385 - 1}{412}\right)}$$

$$= 199.28 \approx 200$$

The researcher took a sample of 200 employees out of the total of the target population. To address each of the four employee levels the researcher decided to use probability proportion to size (PPS) method which is calculated through the formula given below. Probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling is a method of sampling from a finite population in which a size measure is available for each population unit before sampling and where the probability of selecting a unit is proportional to its size (Skinner, 2016).

$$n_h = n \left(\frac{N_h}{N}\right) \quad \text{Where } n_h = \text{Allocated Sample to } h \text{ level of employee}$$

N_h = Total number of employees in h level

n = Sample size of the study

N = Total number of populations under the study

$$N_1 \text{ (Junior Level)} = 124$$

$$N_2 \text{ (Senior Level)} = 215$$

$$N_3 \text{ (Managerial Level)} = 60$$

$$N_4 \text{ (Executive Committee)} = 13$$

$$N = N_1 + N_2 + N_3 + N_4 = 124 + 215 + 60 + 13 = 412$$

$$n_1 = n \left(\frac{N_1}{N}\right) = 200 \left(\frac{124}{412}\right) = 60 \text{ Junior Level employees}$$

$$n_2 = n \left(\frac{N_2}{N} \right) = 200 \left(\frac{215}{412} \right) = 105 \text{ Senior Level employees}$$

$$n_3 = n \left(\frac{N_3}{N} \right) = 200 \left(\frac{60}{412} \right) = 29 \text{ Managers}$$

$$n_4 = n \left(\frac{N_4}{N} \right) = 200 \left(\frac{13}{412} \right) = 6 \text{ Executives}$$

3.3. Data analysis method

This project work was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Thus, the researcher ensured that the data collected must be checked for completeness. The quantitative data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. For the purpose of this research, the relevant descriptive parameters such as the means, percentage, frequency and other necessary parameters which are relevant to answer the research questions were analyzed. Data collected were coded, tabulated and presented according to each independent and dependent variable.

3.4. Reliability and validity

In order to confirm the reliability of data collected through questionnaire based on research questions, research objectives and problem statement, reliability of responses gathered were assessed by Cronbach Alpha Coefficient test.

The questionnaires are grouped into four parts in order to address the four research questions, the below results show the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient test for each section:

Soft skills in project environment: 0.813

Perception about soft skills: 0.703

Enhancement of soft skills: 0.797

Performance and soft skills: 0.813

Accordingly, the results from all questions gave a coefficient of 0.894% it is acceptable as it is over 0.7.

3.5. Ethical considerations

According to (Bhandari, 2021), ethical considerations in project works are set of principles that will guide research designs and practices. These principles need to be followed when data collection occurs. These considerations work to protect the rights of research participants, enhance research validity and maintain scientific integrity. For this project work, the researcher made sure that all involvement in the project is voluntary, informed, and safe for research subjects. Participants were anonymous by not collecting personal information, the data collected was confidential and there was no potential harm to participants. The researcher made sure that the work was free of plagiarism or research misconduct.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through questionnaire, interview and observation. Descriptive statistics like frequency and percentage was used to analyze the data. Interpretations are made based on the frequency and percentages of the data. The findings from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS.

4.1. General background of the respondents

This project work's primary data was collected through questionnaire, interview and observation. The questionnaire was designed by Google Form and distributed via electronically to sample respondents. A sample of 200 respondents were selected for this study, out of this, 189 responded to the questionnaires with a response rate 94.5%.

General background of respondents is presented in a table below:

Table 1: Background of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	122	64.6	64.6
	Female	67	35.4	100
	Total	189	100	
Education	Diploma	5	2.6	2.6
	Degree	126	66.7	69.3
	Masters and above	57	30.2	99.5
	Others	1	0.5	100
	Total	189	100	
Years of experience	below 2	43	22.8	22.8
	3-5 years	46	24.3	47.1
	6- 10 years	44	23.3	70.4
	11- 15 years	39	20.6	91
	above 16	17	9	100
	Total	189	100	
Position	Junior level	58	30.7	30.7
	Senior level	98	51.9	82.5
	Managerial level	27	14.3	96.8
	Executive Officer	6	3.2	100
	Total	189	100	

Source: Survey Result, 2022

From the above table, 64.6% of respondents were Male and 35.4% were Female. Educational background of respondents showed that 2.6% of our respondents have a Diploma, 66.7% of them hold degree, 30.2% masters and above. Employees' years of experience shows that the sample respondents have work experience years with an average of 22.75% among experience levels.

Generally speaking, most participants are male and majority of them have a first degree and masters, with mixed experience that last from 2 years up to more than 16 years. As mentioned in chapter 3, the largest sample was taken from Senior level with 51.9%, Junior, Executive and other have 30.7%, 14.3% and 3.2% respectively.

So, we can conclude that the respondents' years of experience and educational background makes the respondents understand and respond to the questioners with better understanding.

4.2. Soft skills in project environment

Based on the data received through the questionnaire, 96% of the respondents said they effectively communicate with their team member to indicate that the company's employees are strongly communicating each other. From the interview with managers, they strongly believe that communication is the key asset for any employee. In addition to that, communication with stakeholders plays a vital role especially in positions where there is direct interaction with stakeholders of the company, in regards to this, 58% of the respondents strongly agree that they effectively communicate with stakeholders. The researcher also observed that, how communication affects outcome and interaction between company and stakeholders.

Decision making ability affects the company, managers as well as the employee too. Being allowed to be independent to make decision is company's strong asset, in regard to this, 63% of respondents agree that they are able to make decision by themselves and 22.8% of respondents strongly agree they make decisions by themselves. As a result, 85.8% of respondents are able to face challenges, find options and deciding to go with

one option as per the given situation. In addition to that, regarding to managing one's self, 52.4% of respondents strongly agree that they own their position with responsibility and 40.7% agree to the same. This indicates, employees are accountable, reliable and they get the job done with discipline and professionalism. During the interview, respondents magnify their effort in getting employees to participate in decision making about department matters in order to contribute to company's success.

In a diversified environment, interaction with different people with different backgrounds is inevitable; being aware of cultural differences will make teams successful. 51.9% of respondents agree that they aware of cultural differences within their team/company. In addition, 27.5% strongly agree with the above point and 16.4% are neutral about this issue. This indicates that around 80% of the respondents were aware of cultural background of their team members and only the remaining 20% of them lacks awareness of it. Out of this 20% of respondents, 16.4% employees need to work on awareness of intercultural sensitivity within their team.

Employees with a positive attitude have a positive self-concept and self-awareness, from respondents 53.4% strongly agree to this concept 37% also agree to this idea. From interviews conducted, managers said that they try to have a positive attitude towards everything their team members do. The researcher also observed that, trust and confidence of employees is enhanced by creating a positive environment.

Having a strong mental and emotional foundation enables employees and managers to succeed in their career. 41.8% of respondents agree and 29.6% respondents strongly agree to the fact that they can control their emotions in their work environment. As it shows that majority of respondents are comfortable, satisfied and enthusiastic about work. From interviewers, it was mentioned that the ability to manage emotions especially during heated meetings and arguments is very necessary for managers. Team members must focus on objectives of their department and company and they must maintain emotional and physical health.

While at work, anytime, any members of team might have a disagreement which leads

to conflict. From respondents, 54.5% agreed and 28% strongly agree that they are able to resolve conflict that happens between team members or ideas. Data from interview suggested that, conflict management is one of the key soft skills for any employees and managers. When it comes to managers promoting team spirit and team building, 45% and 32.3% of respondents agree and strongly agree respectively that their managers promote team spirit which indicates that the company has a strong sense of team building and team spirit. Managers interviewed also showed a much concern to such activities. The company promotes team building activities and each department's managers take these activities a way to enhance team strength and unity. Observation by the researcher also revealed that there is a strong culture of team building in the company.

Managers must be inclusive in a way that employees give new ideas and thoughts for the better of the department and company. In this regard, 52.4% of respondents agree and 30.2% strongly agree that their ideas are accepted by the managers and they contribute new ideas. As a result, it shows that majority of managers are flexible and they boost the morale of their team members.

As the subject company is new and under formation, new insights and problem-solving ways are much appreciated. Correspondently, 65.1% of respondents agree, 21.2% strongly agree and the rest 13.8% have a neutral opinion that they identify and analyze problems in complex situations. In addition to that, managers interviewed magnified the need of employee's problem analysis capability for the future success of the company.

Generally, result from the below table show most of the respondents believe that communication within the team and stakeholders, decision making, cultural awareness, self-management, positivity, self-control, responsibility, conflict resolution, contribution of new ideas, analysis of complex problems, are among the soft skills needed in project environment. Correspondently, most respondents also say that their managers promote team building and enhance team spirit.

Table 2. Soft skills in project environment

Source: Survey Result, 2022

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
I communicate with my team	0	0	2	1.1	4	2.1	87	46.0	96	50.8	4.47	189
I communicate strongly with stakeholders	1	0.5	3	1.6	21	11.1	106	56.1	58	30.7	4.15	189
I am able to make decision by myself	0	0	1	0.5	26	13.8	119	63.0	43	22.8	4.08	189
I am aware of cultural background of my team members.	3	1.6	5	2.6	31	16.4	98	51.9	52	27.5	4.01	189
I am able to manage myself	0	0	4	2.1	9	4.8	77	40.7	99	52.4	4.43	189
I am positive in everything I do	0	0	10	5.3	8	4.2	70	37.0	101	53.4	4.39	189
I am able to control my emotion	3	1.6	4	2.1	47	24.9	79	41.8	56	29.6	3.96	189
I am able to resolve conflict in my work envt	1	0.5	5	2.6	27	14.3	103	54.5	53	28.0	4.07	189
My manager promotes team spirit & building	0	0	10	5.3	33	17.5	85	45.0	61	32.3	4.04	189
I contribute new ideas/thoughts to my dept. or manager	0	0	0	0	33	17.5	99	52.4	57	30.2	4.13	189
I can identify and analyze problems	0	0	0	0	26	13.8	123	65.1	40	21.2	4.07	189

4.3. Perception towards soft skills

One of the basic focuses of this project work was to explore the perception of employees and managers towards soft skills. In regards to that, 56.1% agree and 32.3% strongly agree that they understand what soft skills contribute to the success of department or company. This result indicates, employees' soft skills ensure a productive, collaborative and healthy work environment, all crucial attributes for organizations in an increasingly competitive world. Results from interview also suggested that managers have strong belief that soft skills are vital in hiring a new employee as well as an asset

to managers. Associated with this, 47.6% of respondents agree, 20.1% strongly agree and 25.4% responded neutral towards managers' identification of soft skills of their team members. This entails managers' observation, leadership and influence towards identifying their team members' skills.

As data shows from the questionnaire, 56.6% of respondents agree and 29.6% strongly agree that education enhances soft skills. Results from interviews added that managers are also responsible for the enhancement of soft skills of employees as they are close to employees and they can recognize their skills. Employees also need to understand their role and contribution to their department/company, in regards to this, 50.3% agree and 49.2% strongly agree that they understand their role in their respective teams.

Generally, as explained above and as shown in the below table, majority of the respondents reflect that they understand the role of soft skills at work place and their managers identify their soft skills. Similarly, most of the respondents describe that their education and experience enhance their soft skills. Which entails that the employees' and managers' perception on soft skills is positive.

Table 3. Perception about soft skills

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
I understand the role of soft skills in my work env t.	0	0	0	0	22	11.6	106	56.1	61	32.3	4.21	189
My manager identifies my soft skills	0	0	13	6.9	48	25.4	90	47.6	38	20.1	3.81	189
Experience and educational background enhance soft skills	0	0	7	3.7	19	10.1	107	56.6	56	29.6	4.12	189
I understand my role in my team	0	0	0	0	1	0.5	95	50.3	93	49.2	4.49	189

Source: Survey Result, 2022

4.4. Enhancement of soft skills

Trainings are one of the best ways companies can develop employee's skills and introducing about company's overall goal. In relation to this concept, 40.2% of respondents agree and 23.3% strongly agree and 21.7% stayed neutral about company giving trainings for new employees. Associated with the above point, 47.6% of respondents agree and 37% strongly agree that trainings to new employee will help achieve company's goals. Interview with managers and observation reveal that the company gives trainings about the overall company information. 42.3% of respondents agree that there are on-job trainings in their departments and 17.5% strongly agree about this issue, although 22.8% are neutral about this issue. Trainings and introductions will be of no use if employees can't see the benefit. So the researcher presented the question if the employee are benefited from the training and 39.2% agree, 21.7% strongly agree and 26.5% stayed neutral about the benefits they have gained.

Managers are mentors, leaders and they guide team members towards success of employees or companies. A good manager knows that soft skills are very essential for hiring decisions as well as during the stay of an employee in the company. As per the respondents, 53.4% agreed and 19% strongly agree another 19% stayed neutral about their manager helping them to learn things step by step. 57.7% of respondents agree and 22.8% strongly agree that their managers help them to practice their skills. Timely feedback on progress of an employee is as equally important as the guidance they receive from managers. In connection to this, 37% stayed neutral, 36.5% agree and 22.8% strongly agree that they get timely feedback on skills. Additionally, 48.7% agree and 29.6% strongly agree that they are benefited from the guidance from their managers. Observation by the researcher show that, the company has a strong culture of giving trainings for new employees as well as on-job trainings. In addition, results from interview reveal that, soft skills are needed to hire a new employees and managers look for them. To enhance what an employee already possesses, respondents said that they will give training and closely follow up on them.

In order to enhance and develop one's skills, the person must be aware of the gaps he/she have in this study, 66.7% agree and 14.8% strongly agree that they have awareness of their gaps. In addition to this, readiness to fill these gaps is very vital, 46% strongly agree and 45% agree that they are ready to fill the gaps they have on their skills. Readiness to fill gaps will lead to a positive contribution to goal achievement of department and company, 59.8% agree and 38.1% strongly agree to this point.

As illustrated in the below table summarizing the above results, the implication towards enhancement of soft skills is seen from three sides, employee, company and managers. Most employees emphasize that they are aware of their gaps and they work on them in order to enhance their soft skills. Result also show that managers have a big contribution in enhancing their team members' skills. The company also enhances soft skills by giving on job trainings and new-employee trainings.

Table 4. Enhancement of soft skills

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
On job trainings are held in my department	10	5.3	23	12.2	43	22.8	80	42.3	33	17.5	3.54	189
I've self-awareness of my gaps	0	0	9	4.8	26	13.8	126	66.7	28	14.8	3.92	189
My manager helps me to learn things step by step	0	0	16	8.5	36	19.0	101	53.4	36	19.0	3.83	189
I believe that my skills will contribute well in my department	0	0	0	0.0	4	2.1	113	59.8	72	38.1	4.36	189
My company gives training for new hires	6	3.2	22	11.6	41	21.7	76	40.2	44	23.3	3.69	189
Inductions to new employees help achieve company's goals	4	2.1	3	1.6	22	11.6	90	47.6	70	37.0	4.16	189
I am benefited from the trainings my company gives	4	2.1	20	10.6	50	26.5	74	39.2	41	21.7	3.68	189
I am benefited from the guidance from my manager	0	0	8	4.2	33	17.5	92	48.7	56	29.6	4.04	189
I am ready to fill my skills gap and do everything to enhance it	0	0	0	0.0	17	9.0	85	45.0	87	46.0	4.37	189
My manager helps me to practice my skills	0	0	1	0.5	36	19.0	109	57.7	43	22.8	4.03	189
My manager feedbacks about my skills on time	0	0	7	3.7	70	37.0	69	36.5	43	22.8	3.78	189

Source: Survey Result, 2022

4.5. Performance and soft skills

Employee performance is dependent on both technical and human skills. In connection to this, 49.2% of respondents agree and 34.4% strongly agree that their educational background made them successful. Results from interview reveal that, educational background is the first criteria an employee looks at when hiring new employees. In order to improve performance, an employee should recognize their gap in skills, from respondents, 49.7% agree and 37% strongly agree that they recognize their gap and try to learn. Interviews conducted showed that managers try to overlook what their team members possess. These managers believe that in order for them to be successful, they must have a team that have a strong work performance.

Performance of team members is also determined by managers taking responsibility for improvement and feedback on daily results. From data gathered, 53.4% agree and 29.1% strongly agree that their manager takes his/her responsibilities very seriously. Sometimes, some employees need a little push from managers to perform well. In connection with this, 49.2% agree, 22.8% strongly agree and 22.2% stayed neutral about their manager pushing them to be their best version. Result from the interview reveal that, apart from pushing employees to perform well, managers involve in improving their team members performance by actually doing activities. These include giving team members the feeling of ownership, encouraging communication and a proper reward system. In respect to this, 50.8% agree, 22.8% strongly agree and 22.2% stayed neutral about managers trying to improving performance of their team members.

Overall soft skills of employees and managers collectively lead to good performance of departments and teams. This will eventually sum up to project and company success. In connection to this, 54.5% agree and 38.1% strongly agree that their performance will lead to project success. During the interview, managers explain that employee's soft skills is vital for achievement of department goals. By recognizing one's soft skills, enhancement, and follow up, managers can improve output of employees.

To generalize the above result, if combined with educational background, employee's performance, managers close follow-up, and managers capability to lead their team, soft-skills can lead to good performance and outcome by the employee.

Table 5. Performance and soft skills

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
I believe my educational background made me successful	0	0	4	2.1	27	14.3	93	49.2	65	34.4	4.16	189
My performance will lead to project success	0	0	0	0	14	7.4	103	54.5	72	38.1	4.31	189
I recognize my gap in skills and try to learn	4	2.1	0	0	21	11.1	94	49.7	70	37.0	4.20	189
My manager tries to improve my performance	4	2.1	10	5.3	37	19.6	96	50.8	42	22.2	3.86	189
My manager pushes me to be my best version	0	0	11	5.8	42	22.2	93	49.2	43	22.8	3.89	189
My manager takes his responsibilities seriously	0	0	4	2.1	29	15.3	101	53.4	55	29.1	4.10	189

Source: Survey Result, 2022

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summaries of the findings, conclusion derived from the analysis and recommendations that are suggested.

5.1. Summary of findings

The objectives of this project work were to examine the role of human resource in employees' soft skills to enhance the performance of employees in a project environment for the success of a project. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Apart from observation, collection of primary data was done through questionnaire and interview. The sample size to distribute the questionnaire was 200 employees out of this 189 of them returned back the questionnaire with answers.

Results showed that communication between team members is very good and employees with direct contact with stakeholders have somehow maintained a good communication. It is revealed that most employees are given a chance to make decision, they perform their position with responsibility and they are independent. Most employees are aware of cultural differences and some stayed neutral about it. Most respondents said they have a positive attitude towards what other team members do and they create a positive work environment.

According to the findings, most employees revealed that they resolve conflicts if they occur within the team. Which leads to team spirit and team building, as per responses from data collection. Most employees said their ideas are accepted by managers and they analyze problems in complex situation. The outcomes indicated that most employees understand the contribution of soft skills for the success of departments. Others revealed that their managers identify their soft skills and they understand their role in their own teams.

As indicated in the results, most employees said they have recognized their soft skills gap and they said they have received trainings and they believe that these trainings lead to achieve company's goals. This happens because of managers overlooking their team members by helping them to learn step by step and giving feedback on time. Most employees said they are benefited from guidance they get from managers.

As noted from questionnaires, most employees revealed educational background contributes to enhancement of soft skills. Most responses showed that performance is gained when managers take their responsibility and most employees said they are pushed by their managers to become good in what they do. The overall result of this project output shows that there is positive relationship between soft skills and project success.

5.2. Conclusion

The main objective of this project work was to explore how employees' soft skills are important to achieve company goal. It was revealed the need of soft skills in employee performance and company success. As per the analysis above the following are conclusions:

The most looked for soft-skills in a diversified project environment are effective communication within teams and stakeholders, decision making ability by giving a chance for the employee to be independent, self-management, taking responsibility, cultural awareness, positivity, self-awareness and positive self-concept. Additional soft skills include strong mental and emotional foundation, conflict resolution and management, team spirit, managers ability to accept new ideas, identification and analyze problems in complex situations

The perception towards soft skills is very positive, employees know that soft skills contribute to success of company. managers also identify soft skills of their team members. Employees also know that education enhances soft skills and they have an understanding that their contribution helps in company success.

The subject company give trainings to enhance soft skills for new employees as well as on job trainings which lead to better understanding of company objectives. Results show that managers help employees to learn things step by step and they guide team members to achieve positive results. Results also reveal that, employees are aware of their skills gaps and they are ready to improve.

Performance of employees is determined by soft skills and educational background. Managers seem to have taken their responsibility very well in pushing employees to become successful. Managers also give team members ownership and encouragement which lead to great performance by employees.

Generally speaking, this project work showed that determining soft skills of employees by self-observation and observation from managers leads to utilization of the skills to enable an employee perform well then this in turn lead to project, department and company success.

5.3. Recommendations

In order to achieve project, department and company goals, importance of soft skills in diversified project environment is inevitable. From data collected and observation, the following possible recommendations are provided by the researcher:

There must be a way to make employees aware of cultural differences by bridging the gap through good communication, valuing diversity, adapting to diversity and cultural contexts, appreciating one's culture, recognizing cultural differences and similarities. This can be done by performing different team activities like celebrating traditional holidays and festivals together, appreciating the art, literature and food of other's team members, and others.

There must be a strong follow up by managers on their team members to identify and analyze problems in complex situations. This can be achieved when managers closely work with team members by breaking down problems, prioritizing, gathering as much

information as needed, analyzing, identifying causes and if the problems can be avoided and finally giving feedback to be accepted and adopted.

Managers should identify the skills that their team members possess for better results. This can be achieved by effective communication, creating a collaborative environment, manager's skills of connecting with their employees, team management and team work, collecting feedback from team members, active listening, being a leader than a manager (working close with team members rather than directing), active listening among other things.

Managers should guide their employees in a step-by-step manner, sometimes employees might have a problem of accessing too much information and burden. Managers also closely follow up and give guidance to their team members rather than standing by-far and expecting results. They are also expected to push their employees to produce good results, some employees need that push in order to succeed.

The training culture of the company must be much better than what is practiced now. On-job trainings can increase productivity and efficiency in many companies. Not only that, it can benefit the company as a whole, from reducing training costs to creating more effective, motivated employees.

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Appendix

Questionnaires and Interview Questions

Dear respondents, I would like to thank you for your time in responding to the research questions provided below. I am a graduating student of Project Management at Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce. The aim of this questionnaire is to gather relevant data for my project work titled **“The Role of Human Resource Recruitment in Acquiring Important Soft Skills for Project Success: The Case of Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia PLC”**. Therefore, I kindly request you to consider your participation in responding to the questionnaire is of high importance to give the research a great deal of clarity about the issue. Any information you provide will be used only for academic purpose and will be treated with strict confidentiality.

“Soft skills” are character traits, behaviors, work habits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people.

PART I. Personal information

1) Gender:

Male Female

2) Education:

Diploma

Degree

Masters and above

Others, please specify

3) Years of experience

Below 2 years

3- 5 years

6- 10 years

11-15

16 and above

4) Position

Junior level

Senior level

Managerial level

Executive committee

Others: _____

PART II.

Please read each statement in this section and decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking your choice.

Soft skills in project environment

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Don't Know
1	I communicate effectively with my team members						
2	I communicate effectively with stakeholders						
3	I am able to make decisions by myself						
4	I am aware of cultural background of my team members						
5	I am able to manage myself to my responsibilities						
6	I am positive in everything I do						
7	I am able to control my emotions in my work environment						

8	I am able to resolve conflict in my work environment						
9	I am able to manage my time effectively						
10	My manager promotes team spirit and team building						
11	I contribute new ideas/thoughts to my department/manager						
12	I can identify and analyze problems in complex situations						

Perception towards soft skills

13	I understand the role of soft skills in my work environment						
14	My manager identifies my soft skills						
15	Experience and educational background enhance soft skills						
16	I understand my role in my team						

Enhancement of soft skills

17	On job trainings are held in my department						
18	I have self-awareness of my gaps						

19	My manager helps me to learn things step by step						
20	I believe that my skills will contribute well to my department's goals						
21	My company gives training for new hires						
22	Inductions to new employees help achieve company's goals						
23	I am benefited from the trainings my company gives						
24	I am benefited from the guidance by my manager						
25	I am ready to fill my skills gap and do everything to enhance it						
26	My manager helps me to practice my skills						
27	My manager feedbacks about my skills on time						

Performance and soft skills

28	I believe my educational background made me successful						
29	My performance will lead to project success						
30	I recognize my gap in skills and try to learn						

31	My manager tries to improve my performance						
32	My manager pushes me to be my best version						
33	My manager takes his responsibilities seriously						
34	Is there anything else you would like to share about soft skills in STEP?						

PART III. Interview questions

1. What is soft skill? In your opinion, which soft skills are the most important?
Which soft skills must a leader possess?
2. How do soft skills lead to project success?
3. How do you enhance the soft skills of your employees?
4. How is one's soft skills contribute to performance and commitment to company?
5. Which soft skills do you focus on when hiring new employees? And how do you identify them?
6. Is there anything you want to add apart from the above questions?