

## The Expectation Of Accountant General's Department Of Malaysia Towards Future Accountants' Skills

Azleen Ilias

Mohd Zulkeflee Abd Razak

Sarah Shakina Mohd Salim

Syafiqqa Razan Rosman

College Of Business And Accounting  
Campus Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah  
Universiti Tenaga Nasional  
Muadzam Shah, Pahang  
Malaysia

<https://doi.org/10.58458/ipnj.v04.01.04.0035>

### ABSTRACT

Nowadays, employers are expecting capable and competent graduates to be hired in fulfilling organizations' goals and objectives. Same goes to public sector organization as facing by Accountant General's Department of Malaysia (AG) in ensuring their future accountants acquired both soft skills and hard skills. Today, future public sector accountants will face more challenging working style since they are being needed to be more effective in enhancing governance, accrual accounting, reporting, auditing and overall accounting practices. Thus, the important of skills and knowledge being needed has been explored and discussed in this current research particularly from the perspective of public sector. In this research, five important skills have been identified to be important for future accountants in order to be employable. The skills are team work, time management, problem solving, communication and knowledge in accounting theory and practice. Furthermore, most employees from AG was expected that future

accountants must be able to work in group, competent to organize workload in meeting deadlines, able to integrate multidisciplinary knowledge to solve problems, proficient to listen and understand information and able to use data, evaluate risks in solving a real world problems. The findings can assist AG in enhancing and improving the competency of junior and future accountants in early stage of being part of AG through internal or external training. Besides that, the important of every skills perceived by employers can facilitate the future accountants to be prepared prior joining AG as public accountants in any of AG unit.

**Keywords:** Accountant General's Department (AG), skills, team work, time management, problem solving, communication, knowledge in accounting theory and practice, accountants.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background Of The Study

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's "EQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, and optimism that characterize relationship with other people. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job" (Schulz, 2008).

Hard skills normally refer to technical procedures or practical tasks that are typically easy to observe, quantify, and measure. The items under hard skills is related to the pursuit of knowledge and formal education (Nikitina, and Furuoka, 2011).

The fundamental requirement for job applications not only in private sectors but also in the public sectors that require the applicants to have soft skills to become more successful in organizations. With the rapid increase in globalization trends and innovations in information technology, it becomes necessary for a business graduates, specially accounting graduates, to survive in the global market environment (Mohamed, & Lashine, 2003). Many firms have begun to recognize the relationship between employees' soft skills and the overall success of the organizations (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, 2010). State Labour Department Deputy Director of Malaysia in The Star Online has mentioned that potential employers demanded soft skills like communication and work competency besides being knowledgeable for the fresh graduates (Chan, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011). Previous Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin has mentioned in Bernama that employers were no longer looking for graduates aimed only with good grades, but were seeking those with effective soft skills such as the ability to communicate well and work in a team (Bernama, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011). He also mentioned that companies or employers did not necessarily hire graduates who passed with flying colors, adding those with average academic qualification but better soft skills had a better chance of being hired and failure to possess soft skills would affect their chances in securing jobs after completing their studies (Bernama, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011). Basic technical skills are often absent and continuing professional development and supports are often not well developed.

Soft skills are important for employability due to the emergence of the knowledge based on economy and proliferation of high

performance in the organizations (Ranjit, 2009). Lacking of soft skills can be lead to unemployment. Having knowledge without soft skills is an obstacle for fresh graduates in job hunting (Chan, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011). The former Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed has mentioned in Bernama that employers in the country said that many university graduates were unemployable because they have no soft skills (Bernama, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

Employers were no longer looking for graduates only with good grades, but were seeking those with effective soft skills such as the ability to communicate well and work in a team. The main role played by universities was to impart knowledge and it was up to undergraduates to acquire the soft skills. Employers did not necessarily hire graduates who passed with flying colors, adding those with average academic qualification but better soft skills had a better chance of being hired said by Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin (The Star Online, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010).

According to the ACCA Report (2010), public sector bodies do not always appreciate the difference between professional and academic qualifications, and as a result a professional qualified accountant is not given appropriate recognition in the salary and benefits system and is therefore less likely to stay within the public sector. Developing accountants for the future requires a concerted and sustained effort by employers, donors and professional bodies to work in partnership to build structures and professional accountancy capacity.

The Accountant General's Department is selected in this research since public sectors

is in progressing to switch their systems to accrual accounting, a model widely used in the private sector. In report done by ACCA (2004) have mentioned that "In year 2000, Malaysia and Tanzania were the only non-OECD countries that were planning to adopt the accrual basis for their central government accounts" (Wynne, 2004) thus need to improve accountants' knowledge and skills. The move to accrual based accounting is part of the process of adopting private-sector-style financial statements for the public sector (Wynne, 2004). In addition, the influence of accounting professions in the development of governmental accounting towards accrual-based has been seen in countries such as the USA and UK. These countries were classified in the same category as Malaysia, both have already adopted accrual accounting for their government accounting and reporting. Accruals accounting is, however, complex and requires more resources both financial and people to operate and many of the necessary skills are still being developed in departments (Wynne, 2004). A wide range of benefits are often claimed to arise from making this fundamental change to financial accounting in the public sector. These include improved accountability, management of assets and generally increased efficiency (Wynne, 2004). Hence, there is a possibility for Malaysian governmental accounting to further develop towards accrual accounting (Zakiah, 2007). The important of skills development was believed to be crucial matters in shifting to accrual accounting methods. Thus, current researchers believed that more research should be done in order to find the dominant or leading skills for future public sector accountants.

### **The Reason Of The Importance Of Skills For Public Sector Accounting**

Based on the ACCA Report (2010), the challenges in improving financial qualifications are a priority for public sector organizations. It is generally resource intensive and a balance has to be struck between funding targeted curriculum development and building capacity within the profession. Equal attention has to be given to developing the accounting technician qualification together with professional qualifications.

Furthermore, the challenges on developing skills that fulfill the job requirement are an acute shortage of qualified finance professionals working within the public sector in developing and emerging economies (ACCA Report, 2010). Basic technical skills are often absent and continuing professional development and supports are often not well developed. Students have reported that they were unsupported, as employers had no formal training structure and very few resources (ACCA Report, 2010).

According to the ACCA Report (2010), qualified accountants working within business will also have a key role to play in putting together and presenting the business case for funding in order to persuade potential investors to provide their support. This will require a combination of technical expertise as well as analytical ability and sound communication skills. In Malaysia, most CFOs, partners and senior accountants expect many skills to be more in demand, including strategic scenario planning, intellectual capital accounting/management, enterprise risk management, improving the use of data and knowledge, building relationships in the business and

with other stakeholders, project modeling/ costing and analytical thinking/ analysis/ including fair value expertise. The majority of CFOs, partners and senior accountants would expect demand for qualified accountants to increase. Increased demand is expected for a variety of reasons, including the need for effective risk management, tighter reporting and other regulations, the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)/ the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSAS) and anticipated economic growth. Qualified accountants need analytical ability and an understanding of the interconnectedness of risk across complicated entities. They also need the ability to communicate with peers and external stakeholders so that they can understand the future vision for the business, as well as clearly understand its past performance. Business success depends on the ability to make sound decisions in a risky, uncertain world. Qualified accountants can help management teams to make those decisions, based on information drawn from accurate data and informed by broad business knowledge.

### **Problem Statement**

For this current research, researchers focused on the Public Sector Accountants. The reason in focusing into accountants in Accountant General's Department (AG) is because accountants need to be accomplished with skills since the public sector is in the stage of preparation in moving to accrual accounting. The accountants must be skillful in order for them to enhance the effectiveness of financial management among the public sector. This is because many fresh graduates face unemployment blues today because they lack of soft skills (Chan, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011). According to the

former Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Mustapa Mohamed which mentioned that university graduates are unemployed due to lack of soft skills. He also said that, graduates should enhance their employability by being global minded, able to work in a team, has excellent communication skills, active and able to make friends easily (Bernama, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2007). With the move from GAAP (General Accepted Accounting Principles) to IFRS (International Financial Reporting Standard) and International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), there is an increase need for accountants with strong soft skills because of IFRS's requirement to apply principles rather than comply with rules (Kermis & Kermis, 2011). Failure to demonstrate the types of soft skills required for a job performance will negatively affect the reputation of the company (Norazila, 2010). In recent research done by Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin and Zehner (2013) also focused on which skills that importance perceived by organizations and they found that highest importance on soft skills and lower importance on academic reputation. They believed that more attention need to be provided to soft skills and problem solving skill. Therefore, in this current research, the aim is to study the most important skills among the potential accountants in the public sector instead of private sector.

### **Research Question**

In order to find the answer to the problem, the research question is:

RQ1. What are the most important soft skills needed for public sector accountants in Accountant General's Departments (AG)?

### Research Objective

The research objective is:

RO1. To identify the most important skill needed for public sector accountants in Accountant General's Departments (AG).

### Significance Of The Study

The significant from this research is to improve and develop soft skills among potential accountants especially in Accountant General's Department, to enhance the employability skills among accountants in AG and to provide information on the importance and required soft skills that give positive impact on employability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Previous Research

The core components of lifelong employability agenda is to improve the soft skills in Malaysian graduates. Based on Ranjit, S. (2009), the most common approaches to developing skills for Malaysian graduates is starting from their learning period in higher education institutions.

There has been an increasing demand from Malaysian employers that higher education institutions produce "work-ready" graduates with adequate soft skills. Employers worldwide want well-rounded graduates who possess discipline-specific knowledge and skills (hard skills), desired soft skills, and preferably, relevant work experience (typically attained through internship or part time jobs). The lack of soft skills has contributed greatly to graduate unemployment, besides factors such as low proficiency in English, lack of relevance of university major jobs available, lack of work

experience and did not having sufficient knowledge and competency (Cruetz, September 2005, Ranjit, 2009, Ji, ,July 2013)

Universities should accordingly incorporate the market expectations to their accounting programs in order to ensure that accounting graduates are equipped with knowledge and skills required by the market and ready for the workplace. However, there are increasing criticisms that accounting education has lagged behind developments in the changing business environment (Albrecht & Sacks, 2000; Carr, Chua & Perera, 2006; Courtis & Zaid, 2002; Evans et al, 2010; Hancock, Howieson, Kavanagh, Kent, Tempone & Segal, 2009; Hancock, Howieson, Kavanagh, Kent, Tempone, Segal & Freeman, 2009; Jackling & De Lange, 2009; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Mohamed & Lashine, 2003; Pan & Perera, 2011).

In a Survey on Employability of Graduates conducted by Bank Negara Malaysia in July 2002, the most widely reported soft skills deficiencies were in communication, action-initiating abilities and problem solving skills. The respondents of the surveyed indicated that graduates did not have the required skills to function effectively at the workplace (Ranjit, 2009). Another research which found that a number of CFOs comment that accounting staff in particular tend to focus on the 'hard' technical aspects of their jobs rather than on honing the soft skills required for professional success and value creation for the business overall (Grant Thornton, 2011). In research done by Hassall, et.al. (2003) which focused into technical skills rather than vocational skills. As mentioned by Chartered Management Accountants

(CMA), technical skills are the most required by which they found ten most important skills needed by CMA.

The literature will continue to discuss only five skills and employability which believed to be important to future accountants and graduates. This is because based on the best knowledge of current researchers from previous researches such as Hassall, et.al., (2003), Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, (2010), Norazila Azli, (2010) and Kermis & Kermis (2011), the five skills are most common to be important in their research.

### **Communication Skills**

Communication skills is the ability to effectively communicate in common global languages, negotiation skills, working in team environments using new communication technologies has become a necessity (Mohamed & Lashine, 2003).

Communication is a two-way process in which an exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas taken place. An effective communicator can coordinates and deliver information in a timely matter. After the message has been communicated, the individual should verify the information to ensure that the receiver has understood the desired message (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, 2010).

Communication skills are important in the accounting profession. Communication skills are valued highly with professional accounting firms and demonstrate that accounting professionals need greater preparation to be more effective communicators (Stowers & White, 1997). Oral and written communication skills are the most important employee characteristic for any job, not just those in public accounting

(Dennis & Pamela, 2009). Previous research done Hassall, et.al. (2003) also believed that communication skills was the most important skill for management accountants. In research done by Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin and Zehner (2013), they found that organizations also perceived that new graduates which possessed soft skills on effective communication and interpersonal skill will be more competitive in the market place. Thus, researchers believed that communication skills will be one of the importance skills should be improved for new undergraduates.

### **Problem Solving Skills**

According to Mohamed & Lashine, (2003) an accounting graduate should have the ability to collect the right information, analyze the business problems using logical reasoning and apply the problem solving methodologies to real world business problems.

Based on the previous research by Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, (2010) has been suggested that great problem solvers are purposes-driven and future minded. Most individuals endure difficult problems because they understand that what they are doing is making a difference, and the result is worth the struggle. In the other words, we should take a step back to consider all options and utilize creative thinking. A purpose-driven individual will never lose sight of the goal at hand.

In a study conducted by the Institute of Labor Studies, it was discovered that problem solving was the second most desirable soft skills sought after by managers (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, 2010). Employers in research done by Hassall, et.al. (2003)

also found that problem skill is also one of important skill needed by management accountant same as research done by Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin and Zehner (2013) which has been identified by employers as one of important factor for evaluate the new graduates' employability.

### **Knowledge Of Accounting Theory And Practice**

According to Ahadiat and Smith, (1994) noticed that knowledge of accounting theory and practice considered importance to accounting firms. The empirical research by Novin and Tucker (1993) showed that, respondent rate the financial accounting, taxation, auditing and accounting information system as a top ten responses to 'needs additional education'. These findings indicate that public accountants, not just want the increase in communication skills, but they also want to possess knowledge of accounting theory and practices. Cornell and Arora (1998) in their research found that knowledge of accounting is the third important skill for accountants. In recent study done on 20<sup>th</sup> century by Grant Thornton. (Summer 2010), they found that lacking of knowledge and technical accounting skills as their second-most concern for non-US company.

### **Teamwork Skills**

Based on previous research by Norazila Azli, (2010) all teams need members who believe in team goals and are motivated to work with others actively to accomplish important task, whether those tasks involve recommending things, making or doing things, or running things. Teamwork is becoming more commonly used and widely accepted as way increase productivity in the workplace. Another essential teamwork

is the ability and desire to commit to a shared team goal. All other teamwork skill are useless without a commitment to the work. With this commitment to the team, members should be willing to take on any role necessary to accomplish the required tasks, whether it is a leadership role or a subordinate role.

### **Time Management Skills**

Individual productivity is a function of the ability to manage commitments within the time available (Kermis & Kermis, 2011). Employers in research done by Hassall, et.al. (2003) also found that time management skill is also one of important skill needed by management accountant.

### **Employability**

According to Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin (2011), there are a lot of research done on graduate employability which produced the breakdown of skills, for examples; key skills, common skills, transferable skills, essential skills, functional skills, skills for life, generic skills and enterprise skills. Yorke & Knight (2006) cited in Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin (2011) has defined that "[Employability is] a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy". Nowadays, to be employable, future graduates must possessed and have necessary skills that are demanded by the employers.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Based on the research objectives which is to study the most important skills among

potential accountants in the Accountant General's Department of Malaysia and to find which skill elements that are requires among accountants in the AG in order to be employable in the future.

### Population And Sample

The targeted population is current employees based on their experiences in Accountant General's Department of Malaysia. Current researchers have send a letter of permission to distribute a set of questionnaire to employees that willingly to answer. In this research, it will use the Cluster Sampling based on nine departments. Cluster samples are samples gathered in groups or chunks of elements that, ideally, are natural aggregates in the population. The targeted population is first divided into clusters (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Once the data has collected, it will be randomly selected to be analyzed. The targeted group will be based on the nine departments under the Accountant General's Department. A total of 270 questionnaires have been distributed in Accountant General's Department which 30 questionnaires is segregated into each department. The sample size is 159 samples based on Sekaran, and Bougie, (2010). Thus, it shows that the response rate in this current research is only 58.89%.

### Respondents' Profile

**Table 1: Respondents' Profile**

Gender	Percent
Male	30.2
Female	69.8
Age	
Less than 20	.8
21-30	48.1
31-40	36.4

41-50	9.3
More than 50	5.4
Race	
Malay	89.9
Chinese	5.4
Indian	3.9
Others	.8
Education	
SPM/STPM	17.8
Diploma	27.1
Degree	50.4
Master	3.9
Professional Certificate	.8
Position	
Deputy Director	1.6
Chief Of Assistant Director	2.3
Assistant Director	12.4
Accountant	17.8
Chief Of Administrative Assistant	3.1
Finance Assistant Officer	3.1
Assistant Senior Accountant	5.4
Information System Officer	3.1
Assistant Officer Information Technology	2.3
Assistant Data Processing	.8
Assistant Operator for Data Processing	.8
Administrative Officer	4.7
Account Assistant	14.0
Account Clerk	9.3
Chief Senior Assistant Director	.8
Personal Assistant	3.9
Other	14.7

It was found that 30.2% respondent were male and 69.8% female. The respondent comprised in the age of group of less than 20 years, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and more than 50. It shows that the highest

percentage of respondent ages is 48.1% which is from group of age range from 21-30 years old, while the lowest is 0.8% which is from group of less than 20 years old. From the above frequency, data shows that most of the respondents were Malays which is 89.9% (116) and the least were others were 0.8% (1). Respondent of Degree holders scores the highest frequency 65(50.4%) and followed up by the Diploma holders 35 (27.1%), SPM/STPM holders 23 (17.8%), Master holders 5(3.9%) and Professional Certificate 1 (0.8%). The respondent who responses the most are in the Accountant position which is 17.8% (23) and the least to respond are the Chief Senior, Data Processor Operator and Assistant Operator which equally scores 0.8% (1) compare to the others.

### Instruments

The instrument is used to gather the information on the importance of skills in order to be employable. The first section of the questionnaire gathers the information of the respondent's personal data. The second section contained the types of soft skills based on the questions.

### Questionnaires Development

**Table 2: Instruments**

Variable	Sources
Communication Skills	Trevor Hassall, John Joyce, Jose Luis Arquero Montano & Jose Antonio Donoso Anes (2003) and Norazila Azli (2010)
Problem Solving	
Knowledge Of Accounting Theory And Practices	
Team Work	
Time Management	

## RESULTS

### Reliability Analysis

**Table 3: Reliability Analysis**

Variable	Cronbach Alpha
Communication Skills	0.911
Problem Solving	0.956
Knowledge Of Accounting Theory And Practice	0.921
Team Work	0.948
Time Management	0.894
Employability	0.879

Based on the results shown above, the Cronbach's Alpha for the overall scale for the 5 main variables are explained well. According to Uma Sekaran and Roger Bougie (2010), the closer Cronbach's Alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability. In general, reliabilities less than 0.70 are considered to be poor, those in the 0.80 range, acceptable and those over 0.90 good. The most reliable and consistent factors are problem solving (0.956), team work (0.948), knowledge of accounting theory and practice (0.921) and communication skills (0.911). For time management and employability, the factors are acceptable since the reliability is in between the 0.8 range.

### Communication Skills

This result shows that from the respondents' point of view, the communication skills are rank as important because when future accountants acquired communication skills, it will help them to understand information. Besides that, it will help them to listen and speak in effective manner and communicate idea consistently. From this result, employers in AG perceived that

listen, speak and communicate effectively has been ranked as the most important aspect in communication skills. In addition this result is supported by Cornell & Raj Arora (1998) who reveals that interpersonal/communications skills are by far are the most important skills in selecting a candidates for accounting staff position. Furthermore, most of the respondents preferred to write and speak well in Bahasa Melayu (Norazila, 2010). Moreover, based on the previous research done by Hassall, et.al. (2003), it can be seen that the employers placed an emphasised on communication skills.

### Problem Solving Skills

Researchers have found that the majority of the respondents have agreed that future accountants with this skills, it will help them to identify and analyses any problems creatively and innovative. Employers from AG have agreed that the most important part in problem skills is need to integrate all knowledge from multidiscipline for the purpose of problem solving and for applying in appropriate solution. This result is also can be supported by previous research done by Norazila (2010), where most of the respondents preferred on decision making, analyses cost problem and choose solution problem rather than apply creative and innovative thinking. In addition, based on the study conducted by Hassall, et.al. (2003), employers have agreed that one of the important skills for management accountant is problem solving skills.

### Knowledge of Accounting Theory and Practice

Knowledge of accounting theory and practice comprises the accounting, auditing and taxation. Therefore, the result shows that from the respondents' view, the knowledge

**Table 4: Percentage For The Importance Of Communication Skills**

Communication Skills	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. Present and defend points of view and outcome of their own work, in writing to colleagues, clients and superiors.	89.1%	10.9%	
2. Present and defend points of view and outcome of their own work, verbally to colleagues, clients and superiors.	85.3%	14.7%	
3. Use visual aids in presentation	85.3%	14.7%	
4. Listen effectively to gain information and to understand opposing points of view.	93.0%	7.0%	1
5. Critically read written works, making judgments on their relevant and value.	90.7%	9.3%	5
6. Ability to listen and speak in effective manner.	93.0%	7.0%	2
7. Ability to communicate ideas consistently.	91.5%	8.5%	3
8. Ability to write and speak well in Bahasa Malaysia.	91.5%	8.5%	4
9. Ability to write and speak well in English.	86.0%	14.0%	

(1=not important to 5=very important)

**Table 5: Percentage For The Importance Of Problem Solving Skills**

Problem Solving Skills	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. Identify and solve unstructured problems.	89.9%	10.08%	
2. Find creative solution.	90.7%	9.30%	5
3. Integrate multidisciplinary knowledge to solve problems.	93.8%	6.20%	1
4. Perform critical analysis.	86.0%	13.95%	
5. Ability to identify and analyze the cause of any problems.	89.9%	10.08%	
6. Ability to choose appropriate solution to the problems.	90.7%	9.30%	4
7. Ability to apply appropriate solution.	92.2%	7.75%	2
8. Ability to be creative and innovative thinking.	89.9%	10.08%	
9. Ability in decision making.	92.2%	7.75%	3

(1=not important to 5=very important)

of accounting theory and practice are ranked important because future accountants will be competent if they have complete, capable and expertise. It will also benefit them to understand complex accounting and auditing standards. Employers from

**Table 6: Percentage For The Importance Of Accounting Theory And Practice**

Knowledge of accounting theory and practice	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. Knowledge of tax and auditing.	82.2%	17.83%	4
2. Ability to identify goals and the information useful for achieving this goal.	85.3%	14.73%	3
3. An understanding the method for identifying, gathering, measuring, summarizing, analysing, and interpreting financial and non-financial data.	86.0%	13.95%	2
4. The ability to use data, exercise judgments, evaluates risks, and solves real world problems.	88.4%	11.63%	1
5. Understanding and applying international accounting standards (e.g. IFRS, IPSAS-cash basis & accrual basis)	81.4%	18.60%	5
6. Understanding complex accounting and auditing standards (e.g. fair value accounting).	80.6%	19.38%	

(1=not important to 5=very important)

AG were believed that capability in utilizing all information in solving problem in a real world is the most important in knowledge and practice, followed by utilizing method to interpret data and ability to identify goals. Even though the knowledge of accounting

theory and practices are not crucially important as it is not at the first, but it was third importance (Cornell & Raj Arora (1998).

### Team Work Skills

The future accountants must have the ability to work in a team. Therefore, the result shows that from the employers from AG views, team work is ranked very important. This is because the potential accountants need to deal with co-workers in various situations with confidences and they need to be responsible in each decision make by the team members. Based on the previous study done by Hassall, et.al. (2003), group working skills are also highly valued by employers. Moreover, most of the employers agreed that very important for their employees to work cooperatively, deal with co-workers in various situations with confidence were important, understand and respect each other important, work well with supervisor also important and responsible decision team members were important and in line with research done by Norazila (2010).

### Time Management Skills

This result shows that time management is ranked very important by the respondents because it will help the future accountants to organize their workloads, to meet conflict demands and unexpected requirement. They agreed that the most important in time management is to organize workloads in order to be recognize, meet the types, strict and coinciding deadlines. Furthermore, research done by Hassall, et.al. (2003) have clearly place an emphasis on time management skills, the three time management skills as their highest ranked skills.

**Table 7: Percentage For The Importance Of The Team Work Skills**

Teamwork Skills	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. Work with others in team.	94.6%	5.43%	1
2. Organize and delegate tasks.	94.6%	5.43%	2
3. Assume leadership positions when necessary.	93.8%	6.20%	3
4. Ability to deal with co-workers in various situations with confidence.	93.0%	6.98%	4
5. Ability to work cooperatively with a variety of individuals.	93.0%	6.98%	5
6. Ability to understand and respect others belief and behaviour.	89.9%	10.08%	
7. Ability to be responsible in each decision make by team members.	93.0%	6.98%	

(1=not important to 5=very important)

**Table 8: Percentage For The Importance Of The Time Management Skills**

Time Management	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. Organize the workloads to meet conflicting demands and unexpected requirement.	88.4%	11.63%	3
2. Organize the workloads to be recognize and meet types, strict, and coinciding deadlines.	91.5%	8.53%	1
3. Select and assign priorities within coincident workloads.	89.1%	10.85%	2

(1=not important to 5=very important)

### Employability

From overall results, researchers have found that future accountants need to possess skill in working in team, managing time, solving problems, communicate well and completely have enough knowledge of accounting theory and practice in order to be employable in AG.

### Descriptive Analysis

The mean are based on 5-point Likert scale. Based on the result, the highest mean is team work which is 4.4828, followed by 4.3850 which is time management. The lowest is knowledge of accounting theory and practice which is 4.2145. As for the standard deviation, the lowest is 0.52529 which is communication skills and the highest is knowledge of accounting theory and practices which is 0.65755.

**Table 9: The Most Important Skills For Employability**

Employability	Considered Important	Considered Unimportant	Rank
1. In overall, how do you perceived communication skills for potential accountants in AGD in order to be employable.	92.2%	7.75%	4
2. In overall, how do you perceived problem solving skills for potential accountants in AGD in order to be employable.	92.2%	7.75%	3
3. In overall, how do you perceived knowledge of accounting theory and practice for potential accountants in AGD in order to be employable.	89.1%	10.85%	5
4. In overall, how do you perceived team work skills for potential accountants in AGD in order to be employable.	93.8%	6.20%	1
5. In overall, how do you perceived time management skills for potential accountants in AGD in order to be employable.	92.2%	7.75%	2

(1=not important to 5=very important)

**Table 10: Descriptive Analysis**

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Communication Skills	4.3290	0.52529
Problem Solving	4.3428	0.57836
Knowledge Of Accounting Theory And Practice	4.2145	0.65755
Team Work	4.4828	0.54404
Time Management	4.3850	0.60589

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to identify the important of soft skills for future accountants in The Accountant General's Department of Malaysia (AG). In order for the accountants to be employable, it represent how important the skills which are Communication skills, Problem Solving skills, Knowledge of Accounting Theory and Practice, Time Management skills and Teamwork. In this study, respondents from AG perceived most all five skills as important for future accountants to be developed in order to be employable as Public Sector Accountants. In this study, findings were found in line with previous researchers which focus on accounting area such as Cornell & Raj Arora (1998), Hassall, et.al. (2003), Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht, & Lee, (2010) and Mohamed & Lashine, (2003). The results shown various findings from both perspective as employers and graduates. In this current study, the most important skill in the ability to work in a team is really perceived important for future accountants as for research objective. This indicate that to achieve a goal in every department and ministry, employees were expected to be able to work, communicate,

discuss every aspect in task in a team work. In this research, researchers only focus on employers' perception on the importance of skills for future accountants which opted to develop their career as public sector accountants, since researchers were believed that there is important to focus into the development of public sector accountants instead only focused on private sectors. This is because the findings from current research has provided value added to AG in order to provide more trainee which in line with their perception of the most importance skills. In future, researchers plan to pursue the study from the perspective of other related government agencies and to investigate the different of perceived important of skill among level of position.

## Recommendation

The lacking of skill among employees and future employees can be improved based on some training, whether internal or external training. Based from the previous research, the soft skills can be improve through in on-the-job training either on external programs or internal programs (Grant Thornton, 2010). Usually, the external programs are supplemented by materials customized by the organization which are frequently used to develop communication and leadership skills. As for internal programs, there are more often used to build problem solving and critical thinking capabilities (Grant Thornton, 2010). According to the research by Wolosky (2008), organization can embed the various soft skills elements in core service-delivery training where they can contract with outside vendors to conduct the training or develop and conduct the training in house, pointing-out that they may have internal 'universities'.

Regularly, accountants tend to failed when they are needed to apply accounting principles for the real-world situations. This is due to their lack in terms of experiences and related soft skills such as lack of knowledge of accounting theory and practices. In research prepared by Stovall and Stovall (2009), they stated that while accountant learn early to follow rules and reference books to find the correct way to account for specific situation, they are not exposed to the types of real world problems that do not have right or wrong answers. This lack of exposure to exercises involving critical thinking and a typical problem solving hurt accountants later in their professional lives when they must make their own judgments on materiality or on improving a client's business process. This problem can be improved by sending high-performing accounting talent to external training sessions and conferences so that they will share their knowledge and at the same time gaining experiences and information (Grant Thornton, 2010).

Other than outside training, accountant also can improve their soft skills in the public sector itself. Accountant can do one-on-one interaction or personal involvement such as mentoring with their peers (Grant Thornton, 2010). Besides that, empirical study by Grant Thornton (2010) also state that accountant can also do a discussion session with senior leaders where the need for skill building is reinforced including one-on-one skip-level interactions to motivate personal soft skills growth.

## REFERENCES

- ACCA Report (2010), *Accountancy: The Future Outlook*. The Association Of Chartered Certified Accountants. BPRI Group.
- ACCA Report (2010), *Accountants For Business. Improving Public Sector Financial Management In Developing Countries And Emerging economies*. The Association Of Chartered Certified Accountants.
- Ahadiat, N., and K.J. Smith (1994), "A Factor-Analytic Investigation Of Employee Selection Factors Of Significance To Recruiters of Entry-Level Accountants," *Issues In Accounting Education*. (Spring), 59-79.
- Albrecht, WS And Sack, RJ (2000) *Accounting Education: Charting The Course Through A Perilous Future*. Accounting Education Series Volume No. 16, American Accounting Association.
- Bernama, (14 July 2007). *Unemployment Due To Lack of Soft Skills*. Available at: <http://bernama.com.my/bernama/v3/bm/printable.php?id=273280>
- Bernama, (8<sup>th</sup> April 2011). *Undergraduates Need To Enhance Soft Skills – Khaled*. Available at: [http://education.bernama.com/index.php?sid=news\\_content&id=577357](http://education.bernama.com/index.php?sid=news_content&id=577357)
- Carr, S., Chua, F., & Perera, H. (2006). *University Accounting Curricula: The Perceptions Of An Alumni Group*. *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, 15(4), 359–376.
- Chan,Z., (15<sup>th</sup> May 2011). *Graduates Lack Soft Skills*. The Star Online. Available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2011%2f5%2f15%2fsarawak%2f8687584&sec=sarawak>
- Courtis, J. K., & Zaid, O. (2002). *An Early Employment Problems Of Australian Accounting Graduates: An Exploratory Study*. *Accounting Forum*, 26(3), 321–339.
- David W. Cornell & Raj Arora (1998): *Preparing Staff Accountants For The Changing Business World-Importance Of Skills*, *Journal Of Customer Service In Marketing & Management*, 4:2, 77-93
- Dennis C. Stovall & Pamela S. Stovall. (December 2009). *Professional Accountants: Void Of "Soft Skills"?*. *The Business Review*, Cambridge Volume 14 (Num.1).
- Dixon,J., Belnap,C., Albrecht, C. & Lee,K., (2010).

- The Importance Of Soft Skills. Corporate Finance Review; May/Jun 2010; 14, 6. pg. 35.
- Evans, E., Burritt, R., & Guthrie, J. (2010). Accounting Education At A Crossroad In 2010. The Institute Of Chartered Accountants In Australia.
- Finch, D. J., Hamilton, L. K., Baldwin, R. and Zehner, M. (2013). An Exploratory Study Of Factors Effecting Undergraduates Employability, Education + Training, Vol. 55 Issue, pp. 681 - 704. Permanent Link To This Document: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2012-0077>.
- Grant Thornton. (Summer 2010). The Evolving Accounting Talent Profile: CFO Strategies For Attracting, Training And Retaining Accounting Professionals. Public Policy And External Affairs, 5.
- Hancock, P., Howieson, B., Kavanagh, M., Kent, J., Tempone, I., & Segal, N. (2009). Accounting For The Future: More Than Numbers, Vol. 1: Final Report. Australian Learning And Teaching Council.
- Hancock, P., Howieson, B., Kavanagh, M., Kent, J., Tempone, I., Segal, N., & Freeman, M. (2009). The Roles Of Some Key Stakeholders In The Future Of Accounting Education In Australia. Australian Accounting Review, 19(3), 249–260.
- International Federation Of Accountants., (2000). IFAC Public Sector Committee. Government Financial Reporting Accounting Issues And Practices. ISBN 1-887-464-43-3.
- Jackling, B., & De Lange, P. (2009). Do Accounting Graduates' Skills Meet The Expectations Of Employers? A Matter Of Convergence Or Divergence. Accounting Education, 18(4), 369–385.
- Ji, (July 2013). Close To Half Of Malaysian Graduates Either Jobless Or Employed In Mismatched Fields. The Star Online. Available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Community/2013/07/27/Close-to-half-of-Malaysian-graduates-either-jobless-or-employed-in-mismatched-fields.aspx/>
- Kavanagh, M., & Drennan, L. (2008). What Skills And Attributes Does An Accounting Graduate Need? Evidence From Student Perceptions And Employer Expectations. Accounting And Finance, 48(2), 279–300.
- Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D., & Lewin, J. (2011), Employers' Perceptions Of The Employability Skills Of New Graduates. Research Commissioned By The Edge Foundation. University Of Glasgow SCRE Centre And Edge Foundation.
- Mohamed, E. K. A., & Lashine, S. H. (2003). Accounting Knowledge And Skills And The Challenges Of A Global Business Environment. Managerial Finance, 29(7), 3–16.
- Nikitina, L. and Furuoka, F. (2011). Sharp Focus On Soft Skills: A Case Study Of Malaysian University Students' Educational Expectation. Educational Research For Policy and Practice, 11:207-224.
- Norazila, A. (2010) A Study Of Soft Skills Among Bank Staff In Kajang. Masters Thesis, Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Novin, A.M., and J.M. Tucker (1993), "The Composition Of 150-Hour Accounting Programs: The Public Accountants' Point Of View," 1 Issues In Accounting Education (Fall), 273-291.
- Pan, P., & Perera, H. (2011). Market Relevant Of University Accounting Programs: Evidence From Australia. Accounting Forum (2011), doi:10.1016/j.acffor.2011.11.001, 2.
- Ranjit, S. M., (2009). The Hard Truth about Graduate Employability And Soft Skills, ADEPT, Higher Education Leadership Research Bulletin (Published By AKEPT, Higher Education Leadership Academy), July/ December 2009, 45-56.
- Schulz, B. (2008). The Importance Of Soft Skills: Education Beyond Academic Knowledge. Journal Of Language And Communication. Vol.2, Issue 1, pp.146-154.
- Sekaran, U. And Bougie, R. (2010). Research Methods For Business: A Skill Building Approach, 5th Edition. New York: John Wiley And Sons, Inc.
- Stowers, Robert H., And Thomas G. White. "Connecting Accounting And Communication: A Survey Of Public Accounting Firms." Business Communication Quarterly 62.2 (1999): 23-40.
- Stovall, D.C. & Stovall, P.S. (2009). Professional Accountants: Void Of "Soft Skills"? The Business Review, Cambridge. Vol. 14, Num. 1, pp.99-104.
- The Star Online, (7<sup>th</sup> March 2010). Undergrads Need To Develop Soft Skills, Says Khaled.

Available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx?file=%2f2010%2f3%2f7%2fnation%2f5813892&sec=nation>

- Trevor Hassall, John Joyce, Jose Luis Arquero Montana & Jose Antonio Donoso Anes. (2003). The Vocational Skills Gap For Management Accountants: The Stakeholders' Perspectives. Innovations in Education And Teaching International.
- Wolosky, H.W. (2008), Closing The Soft Skills Gap. Originally Published In Practical Accountant Volume 41 No. 7.
- Wynne, A., (2004). A Century Of Innovation And Responsibility In Accounting. Is The Move To Accrual Based Accounting A Real Priority For Public Sector Accounting? The Association Of Chartered Certified Accountants. United Kingdom.
- Yorke, M and Knight, P (2006) Embedding Employability Into The Curriculum. Learning And Employability Series One. York: Higher Education Academy in Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin (2011), Employers' Perceptions Of The Employability Skills Of New Graduates. Research Commissioned By The Edge Foundation. University of Glasgow SCORE Centre And Edge Foundation.
- Zakiah, S. (2007). Malaysian Governmental Accounting: National Context And User Orientation. *International Review Of Business Research Papers*, Vol.3 No2, pp.376 – 384.

