

# Technical talent attraction – a study of apparel employees in Sri Lanka

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**DOI:** 10.24427/az-2024-0002

## Abstract

In the apparel industry, there is a growing demand for technically talented employees because of the rapid technological development by converting existing talented employees as un-skilled due to lack of updated knowledge. In addition to that, there are other internal organisational factors and external factors which intensify the crucial nature of the growing issue in the apparel industry. The purpose of this article is to identify and assess the impact of selected factors on attracting talented employees in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire survey was conducted on employees of three large enterprises ( $n = 375$ ). The data analysis has been carried out using SPSS software to analyze quantitative data, and the thematic analysis has been instrumental in the study of qualitative data. The hypotheses testing revealed that career growth prospects and technical knowledge significantly positively impact employee attraction. However, migration intentions and social factors negatively impacted employee attraction.

## Keywords

career growth prospects, employee attraction, migration, technical knowledge

## **Introduction**

The textile sector is one of the most important contributors to the world economy, with millions of employees servicing worldwide. Still, a shortage of technical talent in the apparel industry is reflected, and it has become a rising concern in recent years. The technical competencies required in this profession include, for example, painting, pattern design, and sewing techniques, but also increasingly computer skills and creativity [Kamis & Bakar, 2014]. Accordingly, "technical talent" in the apparel industry is an employee with expertise in manufacturing, design, and engineering. The competencies of technical talents, as well as the job requirements for their positions, may be slightly different in different types of industries, but it is always necessary to have the right competences in order to do the job well.

Effective human talent management is crucial for the business success of modern companies [Szydło et al., 2021; Buele et al., 2024]. One of the key challenges facing the industry is aligning competencies with job requirements. This is particularly true for technical talent. Their technical competencies are very often necessary to do the job safely and efficiently [Yusof et al., 2023].

In the apparel sector, particularly in developed countries, it is observed that technical talent is inadequate to fulfil the textile industry's demand since the market is proliferating from retail consumers. For instance, a McKinsey & Company poll revealed that 50% of fashion executives pointed out that there was a skills deficit in their sector [McKinsey & Company, 2020]. Parallel to this, a World Economic Forum [2018] identified a technical talent shortage as one of the primary issues facing the garment industry. Further, it is determined that technical talent in the apparel industry has also become a significant issue in developing countries. As stated by Gammanpila & Kodisinghe [2020], most of the apparel demand is manufactured in developing countries, and the shortage of technical talent in the industry could affect the global market in the long term.

To address the growing problem of labour shortages in the apparel industry, the causes of the shortage of technically skilled employees need to be investigated. In addition, the workforce must cope with changing organisational and technical requirements with the emergence of automated and semi-automated practices and the implementation of advanced technologies into daily operations. The required upskilling and development of existing skills by employees should be supported by organisational leaders.

The aim of this article is to identify and assess the impact of selected factors on attracting an employee and raising the innovations of technically talented employees in the apparel industry. Based on this, the following research objectives were established:

- to identify factors that are affecting attracting technical employees in the apparel industry;
- to investigate the relationship between employee attraction and factors affecting employee attraction;
- to identify opinions on improving the innovation of technically talented employees;
- to provide recommendations to increase technical talented employees.

Both quantitative and qualitative research was carried out to meet the aim of the article. The hypotheses investigated were verified using a questionnaire survey with 375 employees in the textile sector. The quantitative study complements the information on the possibilities to develop and improve factors within the organisation to attract technically talented employees.

## **1. Literature review**

### **1.1. Career growth prospects**

Career prospects and job satisfaction of garment workers are the subject of current research [McAndrews & Ha-Brookshire, 2020; Durairatnam et al., 2020, Rodrigo & Ratnayake, 2021]. The results indicate, among others, the need to increase opportunities for employees to develop their skills, attitudes and knowledge. Also highlighted is the importance of improving worker motivation and creating a meaningful career path for workers [Gammanpila & Kodisinghe, 2020]. have stated that The work environment significantly enhances career growth prospects [Akhtar et al., 2022]. Leaders and co-workers must support each other to improve their attitudes, thinking patterns, and supportiveness to overcome workplace challenges and strengthen their attitudes to gain career development. According to Akhtar et al., [2022], the textile industry is a prominent industry for professionals with prospective career development pathways and non-professionals for a promising career with higher job stability. Similarly, Gammanpila & Kodisinghe [2020] have highlighted that many professionals within the textile industry search for job promotions at regular intervals due to the rapid growth in the industry and the demand for skilled and experienced employees.

### **1.2. Migration of technical skilled employees**

In the textile industry, higher migration of skilled employees is observed due to the lower salaries offered by local companies, especially in developing countries, whereas higher wages could be obtained while employed in overseas countries under different work agreements. Employee migration could occur when skilled workers

are relocated to other countries at the same organization in one instance [Akhtar et al., 2022]. However, on most occasions, many professionals and technically trained employees seek better job opportunities and higher salaries at different companies rather than being employed in local companies [Dahiya & Nandal, 2021]. Apart from that, Gammanpila & Kodisinghe [2020] have stated that due to the shortage of technically talented employees in the garment industry, there is a good demand for these employees in the international market where employees can demand higher salaries and financial packages from their existing companies, and as well as other competitive companies in the industry.

### **1.3. Technical knowledge of technical skilled employees**

The cost of production depends on how much employees are willing to cover duties and responsibilities within the job [Nanjuneswaraswamy & Beloor, 2022]. Employees with large amounts of talent and willingness to work with higher commitment could be an asset for textile companies. Their dedication, work precision, and higher work engagement could save the company from hiring additional employees to operate the business [Krishnamoorthy & Ramprathap, 2020]. According to Karunarathne [2020], if the Sri Lankan labour market is engaged in active labour transformation from unskilled employees to skilled labour, issues related to the cost of production and technical capabilities of employees could be mitigated. The supply of employees with the proper knowledge has become a significant concern in the textile industry and to gain sustainable growth [Welmilla, 2020]. However, the knowledge required in the technical field in the textile industry is connected to the textile industry itself because job vacancies for technically talented employees can only be filled with employees with previous work experience in the textile industry [Akhtar et al., 2022].

### **1.4. Social factors affecting technical skilled employees**

Work-life balance is one of the critical factors impacting technically talented employees since they expect flexible work environments [Susitha, 2021; Liu-Lastres et al. 2024]. Due to the shortage of technically gifted employees, they can demand specific work arrangements within the employment agreements rather than accepting a job as it is [Akhtar et al., 2022]. In addition, textile companies are also responsible for prioritizing the need for work-life balance among employees and creating a healthy and positive work environment [Krishnamoorthy & Ramprathap, 2020]. Akhtar et al. [2022] have stated that not all employees are motivated and attracted by money. Still, the culture and values companies have developed over the years are also reasons for attracting and retaining employees.

## **1.5. Employee attraction – dependent variable**

Dahiya & Nandal [2021] have revealed that employees are attracted by offering a proper training and development plan, rewards, job satisfaction, clear communication, career development opportunities, and work-life balance in the textile industry. Similarly, Krishnamoorthy & Ramprathap [2020] have pointed out that when textile organizations consist of leaders who maintain open communication and transformational leadership styles with inspiring nature have been able to attract employees. However, [Akhtar et al., 2022] have argued that many employees in the textile industry are attracted by the organization's popularity, financial benefits and recognition offered through the same. Textile companies that experience higher employee turnover have to focus more on employee attraction more concentrated since regular vacancies must be filled up with skilled employees to continue the business uninterruptedly [Gammanpila and Kodisinghe, 2020].

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Conceptual framework**

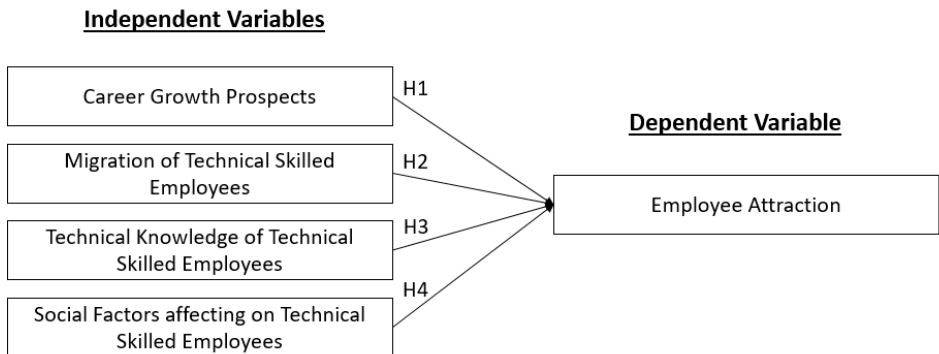
Because of conventional hierarchical structures, career growth opportunities for technically capable personnel in the Sri Lankan apparel industry may be limited [Gammanpila & Kodisinghe, 2020]. Opportunities for experienced workers to improve innovation and automation may exist as the industry adopts technology improvements. Adaptation to changing responsibilities, up-skilling, and alignment with industry trends may be critical for their long-term career advancement in this dynamic profession. Therefore, we hypothesize that career prospects are linked to workforce attraction.

The rise of employee mobility over the past few decades has significant implications for both organizational performance and individual careers [Makarius et al., 2024]. Due to perceived constraints in career progression and income in their home country, many talented people seek better job opportunities abroad. This migration makes it more difficult for the sector to retain and develop its technical personnel [Akhtar et al., 2022]. Addressing this issue is critical for the sector to prosper and guarantee that competent personnel are not left behind, contributing to Sri Lanka's apparel industry's overall development and competitiveness. We hypothesize that there is a link between migration intentions and labour attraction.

The technical knowledge of trained staff in Sri Lanka's apparel industry is critical to their competitiveness. It includes knowledge of clothing manufacturing, design, and technological application. It is critical to ensure that, these staff remain up

to date on the newest industry trends and advances in order to bridge any potential skills gap [Dahiya & Nandal, 2021]. The knowledge enables them to effectively contribute to the industry's growth, consequently alleviating the technical talent gap in the Sri Lankan apparel sector. We therefore assume that the technical knowledge of the workers influences their employment.

Social issues have a considerable impact on technical skilled employees in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Cultural standards, societal conventions, and work-life balance have an impact on professional choices and prospects while gender gaps in access to technical positions may also exist [Gammanpila & Kodisinghe, 2020]. Furthermore, social networks and contacts can help in career success. Understanding and addressing these social aspects is critical for ensuring equitable opportunities and support for technical talent, ultimately addressing the industry's talent deficit. Hence, we hypothesize that the social factors affecting skilled technical workers are related to employer attractiveness. Figure 1 shows the conceptual research model.



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework

Source: own elaboration.

## 2.2. Research methods

This research has been conducted as a mixed method research by applying both quantitative and qualitative research methods using deductive and inductive approaches. The data was collected by focusing on a single time frame through a cross-sectional time horizon. Further, the survey method was conducted to collect primary data, while the interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data. Since the research has been shown as quantitative and qualitative, positivism and interpretivism are applied.

The research population of the study is prepared by focusing on three apparel companies established in Sri Lanka, which go under the names of ABC Apparel, XY

Textiles, and SOS Garments. ABC Apparel had employees up to 4,450, XY Textile reported 3,670, while SOS Garments had employees up to 5,185 with a total population of 13,305.

The sample population is selected using the Morgan Table, and therefore, the sample population is identified as 375 out of the selected population of 13,305 [ $n=375$ ]. One sampling technique has been applied, which includes a simple random sampling method. The questionnaire consists of both closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions focused on independent and dependent variables. Open-ended questions have been targeted to gain a more qualitative type of data. Accordingly, four open-ended questions have been incorporated into the questionnaire, and all participants have the opportunity of answering to these questions.

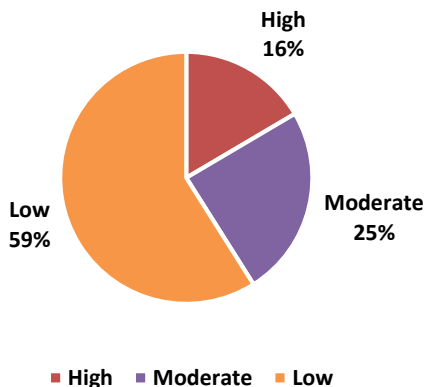
The data collection is conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire, including quantitative and qualitative data. The data analysis has been carried out using SPSS software to analyze quantitative data, and the thematic analysis has been instrumental in the study of qualitative data.

### **3. Research results**

The demographic analysis has revealed that the highest number of participants are female employees representing up to 57.9% of the total population of 375, while the male participation is 42.1%. Due to the nature of work in the textile industry, higher female participation is usual under normal circumstances. 63.5% of participants are single, while 34.7% are married. Accordingly, there is a trend for employees to quit their jobs after their marriage. The majority of participants, up to 30.1% within the sample population, represented the age group of between 26 to 33 years. The younger population is represented from 18 to 25 years, but their representation is low up to 14.7%.

Further, the lowest participation is indicated by employees above 50 years, up to 9.1%. More than 70% of employees had education up to A/L, indicating that the majority is less educated within the sample population. Only 31 graduates and eight postgraduate employees were reported. Out of the participants of the study, up to 59.2% of participants represent sewing associates. Accordingly, lower hierarchy level employees are higher while higher hierarchy level employees are more subordinate. The group reported the most elevated work experience of 1 year to 3 years, up to 32%. 25.1% of employees have reported less than one-year experience. 3 to 5 years of employees have reported up to 22.7% of work experience. Employees with above years of experience are limited within the sample, only up to 8.8%, indicating

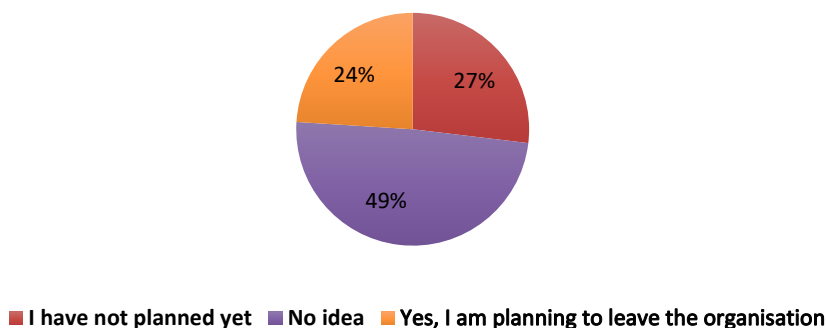
a higher employee turnover. According to the monthly income analysis of the participants, more than 56% of employees derive a salary of less than Rs.50,000-. Only 2.4% of employees are receiving salaries above Rs.150,000-.



**Fig. 2.** Level of job satisfaction

Source: own elaboration.

The level of job satisfaction revealed that 58.9% of participants had lower job satisfaction than the majority. Moderate job satisfaction was indicated by 24.5% of participants. However, the highest level of job satisfaction has shown only by 16.5% of participants. Accordingly, it can be justified that lower job satisfaction could lead to a lack of technically talented employees in the garment industry.



**Fig. 3.** Participants' opinion about retaining in the organization

Source: own elaboration.



Significantly, 24% of participants have already planned to leave their job at the textile company, while 27% of employees have not prepared their decisions to leave the organization. More importantly, 49% of employees within the sample population have 'no idea', indicating potential employee attrition.

### 3.1. Results of the quantitative survey

**Tab. 1.** Reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Values	Cronbach's Alpha
Career Growth Prospects	.979	Employee Attraction	.913
Migration Intentions	.908	Total questionnaire	.745
Technical Knowledge	.863		
Social Factors	.900		

Source: own elaboration.

According to the reliability test (tab. 1), total variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above .700. Considering the same, the complete questionnaire is accepted for hypotheses testing.

**Tab. 2.** Model ummary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate
1	.937	.879	.876	.84502

Source: own elaboration.

The R Square value represents the contribution driven through the independent variables on the dependent variable of employee attraction (tab. 2). Since the R<sup>2</sup> value is reflected as .879, 87.9% of the employee attraction is contributed by the total value of the independent variables. The remaining 12.1% is represented by factors other than independent variables that impact the dependent variable of employee attraction.

**Tab. 3.** Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1900.216	7	271.459	380.161	.000
Residual Total	262.061	367	.714		

Source: own elaboration.

Anova table has explained the overall significance of the regression module through Sig. Value. Since the Sig value is less than .05, this study's general regression is significant (tab. 3).

**Tab. 4. Coefficients**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	-4.736	4.358			
Ind V. 1 – Career Growth Prospects	.281	.105	.275	674	.008
Ind V. 2 – Migration Intentions	-.397	.181	-.233	-2.200	.028
Ind V. 3 – Technical Knowledge	.371	.118	.218	3.143	.002
Ind V. 4 – Social Factors	-.097	.053	-.060	-1.839	.067

Source: own elaboration.

Among four independent variables, 02 independent variables, career growth prospects and technical knowledge have positively impacted employee attraction. Further, the identified positive regression is significant since the Sig value alias P value under these 05 independent variables is less than .05. However, two variables have indicated a negative regression on employee attraction; migration intentions and social factors. Migration intentions reported a negative regression of -.397 under the B value while its P value is .028. As the P value is less than .05, the regression between migration intentions and employee attraction is significant and negative. Nevertheless, even if social factors have indicated a negative regression in employee attraction reflecting a B value of -.097, the sig value is .067, a higher value than .05. Therefore, the negative regression reflected under social factors on employee attraction is insignificant.

Under Hypotheses testing, since the alternative hypotheses are analyzing the availability significance in the relationship, all alternative hypotheses are accepted while rejecting all null hypotheses except the regression between social factors and employee attraction as these two variables have indicated a P value higher than .05.

**Tab. 5.** Correlation

	R-Value	P-Value
Career Growth Prospects	.923	.000
Migration Intentions	-.921	.000
Technical Knowledge	.912	.000
Social Factors	-.788	.000

Source: own elaboration.

As stated in the correlation analysis (tab. 5), 02 independent variables have reported a positive relationship with the dependent variable of employee attraction. These variables are recognized as career growth prospects and technical knowledge which explains that organizations need to improve these indicators to increase employee attraction. On the other hand, migration intentions and social factors indicate a negative relationship with employee attraction. Hence, the management should reduce the impact of migration intentions and social factors to improve employee attraction.

### 3.2. Results of the qualitative analysis

A questionnaire study contained open questions that allowed to learn about employees' opinions about the influence of technology on their work and skills, possibility of development, and innovation. Below are the results of the study on the following questions.

*Question 01 – How do you think the growth of technology affects your technical skills and knowledge?*

The growth of technology has supported improving decision-making capabilities, problem-solving skills and data interpretation of participants. Further, participants have stated that improving their skills is essential to match technological growth continuously. The new technologies have created new challenges and complexities, and it isn't easy to adapt without up-skilling and knowing new knowledge. Further, new skills, such as communication and collaboration, are needed for participants to adapt to new technologies. The company has adopted innovations and technologies where employees are necessitated to participate.

*Question 02 – What are your recommendations to improve organizational factors to attract technically skilled employees?*

Participants have stated that flexible work environments, supportive and inclusive work cultures, strong employer brands, positive employer reputations, continuous learning environments, a robust organizational support system, and positive work culture should be established in organizations. Apart from that, textile companies should provide opportunities for work-life balance, career growth opportunities,

competitive compensation packages, coaching and mentoring programmes, comprehensive benefits packages, attractive salary and benefits packages, and professional development programmes should be established.

*Question 03 – Are you satisfied with the technical staff attraction rate at the company?*

Most participants are not satisfied with the employee attraction rate by the company. Accordingly, participants No. 3, 10, 34, and 60 have negatively commented about the attraction strategies adopted by the company.

*Question 04 – What are your suggestions to improve the innovation skills of technically skilled employees?*

Twenty participants have stated that training and development programmes designed to improve innovative skills should be provided for employees. Thirty-two employees have suggested that the existing structural process should be reduced by allowing employees to engage in creative activities. More than 10 participants have explained that an innovative culture is a must for the organization to promote innovative skills among technically talented employees.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The textile and clothing sector uses, in addition to process automation, modern technologies and solutions [Jahan et al., 2022]. Managing the apparel sector companies requires market orientation to increase general results based on consumers [Gul et. al., 2021]. The development and meeting of market and consumer requirements require the attraction of technically talented employees. The literature review shows that technically talented employees seek career growth prospects, opportunities to grow their skills and knowledge, and financial benefits [Chong & Wong, 2019]. The migration of technically skilled employees is another issue for the growing shortage of technically talented employees. A survey has been conducted to collect quantitative data, leading to statistical analysis and hypotheses testing. The hypotheses testing revealed that career growth prospects and technical knowledge significantly positively impact employee attraction. However, migration intentions and social factors negatively impacted employee attraction. Nevertheless, migration intentions have a significant impact, while the relationship between social factors and employee attraction is insignificant. Based on these values and results, H1a, H2a, and H3a are accepted while rejected H4a.

Textile organizations should provide training and development programmes and mentoring programmes to develop career growth prospects in textile companies. Further, the migrations among technically talented employees could be avoided by offering growth opportunities, competitive compensations and benefits. Moreover,

technical knowledge can be developed among talented technical employees through knowledge-sharing programmes and encouraging participation in industry events. To increase employee attraction through negative social factors, it is required to build diversity and inclusion and offer attractive employee benefits. Further, competitive salaries should be provided to attract technically talented employees. Moreover, leaders should be positive, transformative, inspired and motivated to attract and retain technically gifted employees.

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## **Przyciąganie utalentowanych pracowników technicznych – wyniki badania pracowników branży odzieżowej na Sri Lance**

### **Streszczenie**

W branży odzieżowej istnieje rosnące zapotrzebowanie na technicznie utalentowanych pracowników między innymi ze względu na szybki rozwój technologiczny. Brak zaktualizowanej wiedzy wymaga rozwoju posiadanych pracowników oraz przyciągania nowych talentów technicznych, posiadających wymagane umiejętności. Oprócz tego istnieją inne wewnętrzne czynniki organizacyjne i czynniki zewnętrzne, które nasilają kluczowy charakter rosnącego problemu w branży odzieżowej. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja i ocena wpływu wybranych czynników na przyciąganie utalentowanych pracowników w branży odzieżowej na Sri Lance. Badanie kwestionariuszowe przeprowadzono w grupie pracowników trzech dużych przedsiębiorstw (n = 375). Analiza danych została przeprowadzona przy użyciu oprogramowania SPSS do analizy danych ilościowych, a analiza tematyczna odegrała kluczową rolę w badaniu danych jakościowych. Testy hipotez wykazały, że perspektywy wzrostu kariery i wiedza techniczna znacząco pozytywnie wpływają na przyciąganie pracowników tej branży. Jednak intencje migracji i czynniki społeczne negatywnie wpływają na rozpoczęcie pracy w tym zawodzie.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

perspektywy rozwoju kariery, przyciąganie pracowników, migracja, wiedza techniczna