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Soft Skills Needed for the 21st-Century Workforce

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Technical skills are no longer enough for workers to compete in this highly competitive global work environment. Soft skills are of paramount importance. A multiple-case-study design through the lens of emotional intelligence formed the basis of the research study. The focus of the research was identification of the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry. Three logistics organization leaders in the counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset, New Jersey, were participants in the study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and the review of company documents Four themes emerged through data analysis of converging multiple data sources: (a) the use of a combination of group and individual training, (b) the identification of training needs by individual, (c) the use of a systematic method to resolve emotional behaviors at work, and (d) the importance of effective communication.

Keywords: *21st-century workforce, distribution, emotional intelligence, logistics, soft skills, training*

Introduction

Possession of technical skills alone is no longer sufficient for employees in the highly competitive marketplace (Lazarus, 2013) of the 21st century. The need for individual soft skills has taken on heightened importance (Seetha, 2014). The most valuable employees in the organization have a mix of both hard and soft skill competencies (Griffith & Hoppner, 2013).

Background of the Problem

Employers seek individuals to fill their existing job openings based on the skill level for the position. The historical focus has been on hard skills. Hard skills are typically technical in nature and easier to assess within a short time frame. As businesses face a changing competitive battleground, the employee skill set needs are evolving as well. The new world is a place where technology is constantly improving and influencing change in the workplace (Connell, Gough, McDonnell, & Burgess, 2014). The new world includes diverse work groups who can have the ability to interact globally with different cultures. The ability to use interpersonal communication skills is critical for employees to work with and understand team members. The workforce mixture is changing. There is a combination of individuals from multiple age groups including individuals nearing retirement (Bailey, 2014). Included in the mix are people of different ethnicities and genders. Generational changes have resulted in the increased demand for employees with soft skills (Bailly & Lene, 2013).

Problem Statement

There is a shift in business to focus on worker knowledge to gain a competitive advantage (Wu, Lee, & Shu, 2013). This shift has enhanced the importance of workers' hard and soft skills (Borghans,

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Weel, & Weinberg, 2014). Fifty percent of employers surveyed globally identified workers with a skills gap to be deficient in soft skills (Hurrell, 2016). The general business problem is that some workers lack soft skills; the specific business problem is that some leaders in the logistics industry lack soft skills training strategies for employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the successful soft skills training strategies used by logistic industry leaders. The target population was leaders in three organizations in the logistics industry located in one of the central New Jersey counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset who had successful soft skills training strategies in leading logistics workers. The study may contribute to social change by identifying the efficacious soft skills training program strategies for the 21st-century workforce in the logistics industry. Identification of the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry may inform leaders about ways to train workers lacking in soft skills to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace. Use of the knowledge may positively benefit workers who are unemployed or who are not performing well in their current positions.

Conceptual Framework

Salovey and Mayer (1990) first discussed the tenets of emotional intelligence. The definition of emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to identify his or her feelings, manage their feelings, and use the information about one's self and others to affect future behavior. Goleman (1995) identified emotional intelligence theory. The four areas of emotional intelligence Goleman described are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Goleman posited that the four areas of emotional intelligence influence the individual and form the basis of their behavior.

Emotions are part of an individual's personality (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). They can be either positive or negative depending on the circumstances. Emotions encompass the traits defining an individual's soft skills. Identifying and managing soft skills correlates with increases in employee productivity and organizational success (Benjamin, Gulliya, & Crispo, 2012).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature Review

The literature review comprises four sections. The focus of the first section is emotional intelligence. The second section includes details about soft skills. The third section contains a summary of the evolution of soft skills at the workplace. The fourth section, about potential beneficiaries of soft skills training, identifies the different groups of individuals who might benefit from soft skill development.

Emotional Intelligence

The subject of emotional intelligence has gained interest since the original introduction through the works of Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Daniel Goleman (1995). The evidence of increasing interest in emotional intelligence is present by a search on the term in the Thoreau multidisciplinary database, yielding hundreds of results. Organizations interested in understanding the link between organizational performance and emotions have studied emotional intelligence (Chin, Anantharaman, & Tong, 2015).

Wisker and Poulis (2015) identified emotional intelligence as a component of soft skills, noting the critical nature of the skills for work. While consideration exists for emotional intelligence in a

positive work environment, Ybarra, Kross, and Sanchez-Burks (2014) stated the emotions of an individual in a negative work environment could result in a negative effect on the person's interpersonal skills. Emotional intelligence is the link between emotions and performance that drives corporate interest in the subject (Joseph, Jin, Newman, & O'Boyle, 2015). Job satisfaction, motivation, interpersonal skills, and quality of life may affect an individual's emotions (Siddiqui & Hassan, 2013).

Soft Skills

The soft skills identified as important in the workplace include communications, teamwork, motivation, problem-solving, enthusiasm, and trust (Chute, 2012; Ellis, Kisling, & Hackworth, 2014; Rasul, Rauf, & Mansor, 2013; Robles, 2012; Wahl et al., 2012). Soft skills are critical to success in business (Dana, Hancock, & Phillips, 2011). The wrong decision about a candidate's knowledge and skills can be costly to an organization (Velasco, 2012) due to resulting effects on business outcomes such as worker behavior, safety, productivity, engagement, and withdrawal.

The ability to communicate is an integral skill for workers. Individuals who lack interpersonal skills are more likely to be involved in interpersonal conflict (Moeller, Robinson, Wilkowski, & Hanson, 2012). Pattillo (2013) stated that management spends the majority of their time communicating. Language is the root of communication (Kahlon, 2013). Language helps people to understand others emotions and aids in the formation of social skills (Benjamin et al., 2012). Forms of communication include interpersonal communication, verbal, and written (Keyton et al., 2013). Listening skills play an important role in the communication process (Pop & Sim, 2012). To be an effective communicator, an individual must first be a good listener. An individual should focus on hearing what an individual says, taking what they heard and drawing inferences and asking questions to clarify any parts of the conversation either not heard or misunderstood (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011). Organizational success correlates to effective communication (Waldeck, Durante, Helmuth, & Marcia, 2012). Supervisor listening is a key for catalyzing employee job satisfaction, and positive organizational behavior outcomes (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2015).

Individuals born into different generations have differing communication styles. The Millennial group, which includes individuals born in 1980 through 2000, has grown up in the age of connection to each other through technology (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011). Arguably, the availability of technology may have contributed to their lack of soft skills. Generation Z, which spans individuals born during the years of 1993 through 2005, has only known technology (Turner, 2015). Generation Z is inclusive, with the majority of the members owning a cell phone. Electronic communication has replaced some face-to-face conversations as the preferred mode of communication (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014), which can result in individuals lacking soft skills.

As businesses leverage human capital, an individual's aptitude to learn becomes more important than his or her existing experience (Galabova & McKie, 2013). Companies are searching for workers who are self-motivated and who can work independently (Wahl et al., 2012). Lean workforces have resulted in individuals taking on more work with less time for worker training. Individuals need to possess the skills to enable them to do the work themselves without asking others. The focus is on the creation of a workforce with increasingly strengthened soft skills during their career, regardless of the employer (Windsor, Douglas, & Harvey, 2012).

The Evolution of the Role of Soft Skills in the Workplace

The basis of the definition of success in the early workforce was on an individual's hard skills that include their physical ability to get the job done. The concept of work was associated with an

individual's ability to attain the American Dream, regardless of the personal costs due to loss of freedoms or dangerous working conditions (Crain, 2012). Intense global competition has resulted in an emergent workforce where soft skills are among the most valuable assets an employee can possess (Cobo, 2013).

There has been a progression in the workforce from the early 1900s considered as the epoch of the first industrial revolution (Magnusson, 2014), where men worked while women stayed at home and raised the children. The focus in the workplace was on mass production (Piercy, 2012). The history of the workforce in the United States includes challenging economic times during the Great Depression (Eichengreen, 2012), high unemployment during World War II and the Vietnam war (Wisman & Pacitti, 2014), the emergence of computers to increase work efficiency, and the feminist struggle (Gordon, 2013).

The presence of women in the workforce has changed some business outcomes. Women typically have greater empathy and stronger relationship building skills than men (Matsa & Miller, 2014). The identification translates into the view of women as weaker than men in physical labor with a stronger balance of soft skills. Although opportunities exist in the workplace for women, some women cannot seize the opportunities due to challenges of balancing home life with work (Sudha & Karthikeyan, 2014). For example, although women work full time, they still bear the responsibility for housework and rearing the children (Yu, 2014).

Potential Beneficiaries of Soft Skills Training

The individuals who may benefit from soft skills development include high school dropouts, individuals released from incarceration, individuals who are in poverty, unemployed, aging workers, immigrants, new college graduates, and military professionals (Wozniak, 2011). Any individuals who lack soft skills may benefit from the development of soft skills. The list of individuals includes Millennials, Generation Y, and Generation Z youth who have grown up using technology as the main source of communication.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was this:

> *Research Question:* What soft skills training strategies do leaders in the logistics industry use?

Interview Questions

The interview questions for this study were as follows:

1. What strategies exist for training soft skills in your organization?
2. What strategy do you consider most important and why?
3. What is your most successful soft skills training strategy?
4. What strategies do you use to overcome challenging workplace behaviors?
5. What soft skills do you consider the most important?
6. What are your strategies for dealing with emotional behaviors?
7. What types of workers have you observed with soft skills challenges?
8. What makes your soft skills training program successful?
9. How is the success of your soft skills training program measured?
10. What would you like to add that was not covered in the interview questions?

Research Method and Design

A multiple-case-study design and the verified lens of emotional intelligence formed the basis of the qualitative research study. In this study we focused on the successful soft skills training strategies for the 21st workforce in the logistics industry. Qualitative researchers interpret information while quantitative researchers focus on the examination of variable relationships or groups (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Qualitative research is emergent in design (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The study developed, and the themes emerged based on the feedback of the study participants and the review of company documents. Therefore, the qualitative method was the best method to use in identifying successful soft skills training strategies.

Wahyuni (2012) indicated using multiple sites in a case study to understand differences among the locations. The design of the study was a multiple-case study. Our intent was to understand the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry. The identification of the successful soft skills training strategies was through data collected from three organizations in the logistics industry. We became aware of the successful soft skills training strategies through the responses of the interview subjects and review of company documents.

The justification for selection of the study design was to research different sites in the logistics industry to explore successful soft skills training strategies. Radley and Chamberlain (2012) described the connection of cases to each other via what they term a *virtual span*. The authors indicated the information derived from a multiple-case study was not sufficient for transferability across every area. However, the compilation of information gained from multiple cases may be useful in drawing generalizations to other similar groups.

Participant Selection

Companies in the logistics industry comprised the population for the study. The geographic area for the organizations was the New Jersey counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset. Logistics leaders who had successful soft skills traning strategies were the study participants.

We used random purposeful sampling in the study. Random purposeful sampling involves purposefully determining a group of individuals suitable for the study (Coyne, 1997; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) as it is not practical to target the entire population (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). The researcher uses random purposeful sampling when the intent is to focus on a specific group (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). In the study, leaders in the logistics industry who had successful experience in leading logistics workers were the target group. It is imperative the individuals selected for the study have successful relevant experience in addressing the specific business problem. Utilizing a purposeful sample ensured the interview participants were qualified to answer questions and provide relevant documents regarding soft skills. Upon identification of the logistics organizations, participants were randomly selected from the group. Following Guarte and Barrios (2006), we used our logistics experience as a basis for participant selection.

The study consisted of three interviews with leaders in the logistics industry. The consensus in the field of research does not specify an exact number of interviews. There is a focus on an important factor in determining the number of interview participants, which is the ability to reach and demonstrate data saturation. The description of the data saturation point is the time when no new themes emerge (Francis et al., 2010). It is also important to ensure the interviews are lengthy enough in the process, so there is a collection of a sufficient amount of information to consider

(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The selection of qualified interview participants results in the reduction of the number of participants needed for study purposes (Mason, 2010). If we did not achieve data saturation from the initial three interviews, additional interviews with logistics leaders who had successful experience in leading logistics workers would have been added until data saturation occurred. The criterion for selection of interview individuals included a minimum experience of 2 years in the logistics industry and successful soft skill training strategies of logistics workers.

Data Analysis and Results

We used semistructured interviews and document review to explore the research question for this qualitative multiple-case study: What soft skills training strategies do leaders in the logistics industry use to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace? Understanding one's emotions as well as the emotions of others is a crucial factor for effective communications (Kim, Khon, & Aidosova, 2016). Individuals with high emotional intelligence are better at handling work stress leading to less counterproductive work behaviors (Keskin, Akgun, Ayar, & Kayman, 2016). Positive employee customer interaction contributes to customer retention and company profitability (Prentice, 2016).

The *Qualitative Analysis Guide of Leuven* is an outline for qualitative study data analysis (Apers et al., 2016; Dierckx de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, Denier, 2012; Tiedtke, Donceel, Rijk, & Dierckx de Casterle, 2014). We followed the steps outlined in the guide for data analysis in this multiple-case study. Continual review and comparison of data occurred through the process. Following the example of other researchers (e.g., Chew-Graham et al., 2012; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Lin, Wu, & Tsai, 2012) we developed the findings from the study and compared the findings with those expected from the conceptual framework through the resultant emergent principal using coding and NVivo's software.

Three logistics company leaders identified in the study as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), and Participant 3 (P3) from Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset counties participated in the study. Four themes emerged through data analysis of converging multiple data sources: (a) the identification of training needs by individual, (b) the use of a combination of group and individual training, (c) the use of a systematic method to address emotional behaviors at work, and (d) the importance of effective communication.

Theme 1: Identify Training Needs by Individual

Individual training and development programs are essential to organizational success (Khattak, Rehman, & Rehman, 2014). Emotional intelligence training thought to be specific to the individual may also have group implications (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013). P1, P2, and P3 shared that the training curriculum for the employees at their respective companies is determined based on individual needs. P1 added additional thought about individual training:

> The earlier in an individual's career that they are trained in soft skills, the better off they will be. In later years, individuals may be more resistant to change. Soft skills training should be incorporated into college curriculum to cover the "How" as well as the "What." Doing so would be strategically beneficial for working world success.

P1's company documents about career development stress the importance of a development plan for each individual. The expectation exists that employees are accountable for their training and development. A company document about career growth stated, "We expect employees to bring the drive and vision for their own career."

Anthony and Garner (2016) agreed that educators should prepare college students for employment by increasing the opportunities for teaching soft skills in all courses. Furthermore, students react positively to learning where there is active engagement such as with the use of guest speakers in the classroom (Anthony & Garner, 2016). P1 shared a key to successful soft skills training is in role-playing.

> Role-playing is underestimated but essential. Individuals who may be faced with emotional individuals need to be ready to respond, and a very important preparation tool is through role-playing. Training programs need to incorporate real life situations so that the trainees can relate to the theory and tools being presented.

P1 stated that it takes practice for individuals to learn how to react in pressure situations. Role-playing provides the opportunity for individuals to practice working through their reactions to different scenarios. Soft skills have improved in individuals participating in business simulations (Levant, Coulmont, & Sandu, 2016). In a project simulation study that included role-playing, Geithner and Menzel (2016) found that the simulation improved the participants' soft skills. One of the benefits of the simulation was that participants could make decisions without fear of failure. Levant et al. (2016) agreed that business simulations contribute to active learning. Eleven of the soft skills measured in the study by Levant et al. (2016) increased after participants engaged in simulations.

P2 shared the importance of coaching each individual on how they interact with customers. P2 said, "The best strategy would be continuing to reinforce what they should be doing. The important skills are their ability to deal with customers." A key focus for P2's company is customer retention due to the competitive nature of the industry. P2 shared that it is important for the employees to understand how difficult it is to gain new business and stated, "So, once we get a new account, we go to the nth degree to satisfy the customer and retain the account." P2's company website states that exceptional service is a differentiator. The customer testimonials confirm that the company provides exceptional service including that employees are responsive, pleasant, and accommodating. "Everyone is very helpful and a pleasure to interact with. Thanks for your excellent customer service," wrote a customer. Another customer posted, "Thanks again for the great customer service!"

A job description at P3's company requires the employee to "coach and train team members to improve performance." There is a focus at P3's company on staff development. The focus is evidenced while reading company job descriptions. A job description requirement is for the employee to have "… interpersonal skills; ability to foster teamwork and motivate/coach others." A notation on another job description is the employee "… is responsible for the training and/or coordination of training for team members." "Train new associates …" is on another job description. P3 stated, "[I] do a lot of hands-on training in the event individuals are struggling." The training is associated with an area of work where the individual is struggling to be successful. Because companies report that their employees are lacking in soft skills (Hurrell, 2016) it is important that they develop a training plan to address the gaps. Individual soft skills training may come with challenges. Due to the lack of an ability to demonstrate the performance of a task a specific way, individuals may be resistant to change soft skills because they think they are already proficient in soft skills (Laker & Powell, 2011).

Theme 2: Combination of Group and Individual Training

Organizational leaders recognize the need for enhanced employee skills in the highly competitive marketplace. Increased training opportunities are required to address the skills deficit and maintain competitiveness (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013). The companies involved in this study

use a combination of group and individual training to accomplish their strategic training goals. P3 indicated the use of a combination of one-on-one and classroom training. P3 said, "I do one-on-one and group [training] depending on the situation" and shared that one reason that group training is preferred is to avoid singling out an employee as it may give the appearance to the other workers that the individual is needy. "I try to do a combination of the both [one-on-one and group training]," said P3. It is very important to P3 that the employees understand how to communicate with the customers. A singular training focus may be used in addition to group training to ensure that the employees communicate effectively.

Of the three companies, P1's company has the most extensive training program. As stated in company documents, an expectation exists that employees will take charge of their own career and growth. The following statement exists in a company document referencing talent acquisition: "The creation of a development plan starts with the employee who knows best where they are motivated to grown and learn." P1's company provides the necessary training tools. A company document outlining the leadership development program provides that the tools come from programs that focus on "leadership development, management education and development, personal and professional development including online learning, and leadership." The talent acquisition documents from P1's company include that learning is individual, from others, and from training.

Employee coaching takes place at P2's company to ensure individuals understand their role in representing the organization when dealing with customers in person or on the phone. Karlsson and Skalen (2015) stated that some frontline employees understand the strategies for the companies where they work. Iyer and Fohlke (2015) found that an inverse relationship between an employee's role ambiguity and the level of service that they provide to their customers examined the importance of an external customer mindset. Managers should work on reducing the employee's role ambiguity through feedback and training programs in addition to ensuring that company reward systems align with customer service goals (Iyer & Fohlke, 2015). P2 shared the most successful soft skills training strategy is continual reinforcement of positive behaviors. Impromptu meetings and individual employee meetings occur at P2's company. P2 said, "We will have impromptu meetings with them in the mornings … or when they come back in the afternoon we will speak with them."

Altindag and Kosedagi (2015) stated that managers who have a low emotional intelligence level are not equipped to affect organizational culture. In organizations such as the company where P3 works, some managers "lead by example"; additional focus may need to be on soft skills training for both managers and frontline workers if the managers lack emotional intelligence. Altindag and Kosedagi, posited that organizations should train individuals on emotional intelligence because emotional intelligence may be the driver for some soft skills. This idea was in contrast to training soft skills to gain emotional intelligence. Hendon, Powell, and Wimmer (2017) identified a correlation between positive emotional intelligence and soft skills. As stated in Hendon et al. (2017), a review of the skills a person possesses and those skills lacking aids in determining training opportunities for that person.

Theme 3: Systematic Method to Address Emotional Behavior

Emotions are part of the communication process for individuals (Hendon et al., 2017). Understanding an individual's emotions is an aid in proper communication response. Ahmadian, Azarshahi, and Paulhus (2017) found that the style of delivery such as the pitch could influence the success of one's communication. Without emotional intelligence and communication, negative workplace behaviors may occur (Hendon et al., 2017). P1, P2, and P3 each have strategies to address emotional behaviors at their respective work sites that focus on dealing with the behavior. P2 stated,

"The strategy for dealing with emotional behaviors depends on the situation. Although people get upset and have bad days, their feelings should not affect their ability to deal with the customer. The relationships with the customers' are important."

Prentice (2016) found that the service that employees provide to customers affects the firm's ability to retain customers. Prentice further stated that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle work stress and emotionally charged issues in the workplace, which results in a higher perception of quality by the customer. P2 recognizes the importance of customer retention. Losing a customer due to inappropriate emotional behavior of an employee has the potential to negatively impact sales.

Emotionally intelligent individuals are a factor in reducing conflict in cross-functional sourcing teams (Kaufmann & Wagner, 2017). When negative emotional behaviors occur, some organizations implement work rules to address the issues. P1 shared specific details about the strategy to deal with emotional behaviors:

> The best strategy to use for dealing with emotional behaviors is to attempt to defuse the situation, validate their emotion … don't attempt to judge or manage emotion, focus on their behavior and help them to understand what is considered acceptable/unacceptable behavior, and work with the person to develop the best solution going forward.

Although constructive conflict is viewed positively in some work environments (Harrington & Carawan, 2016), individuals who are the targets of negative workplace behaviors tend to react emotionally (Keskin et al., 2016). It is important for organizations to address behavioral issues at work so that they do not disrupt the workforce. Company documents from all three organizations indicate that customer service is important to the respective organizations. "Strong customer orientation" is a job requirement at P1's company. "Exceptional service" is a differentiator shown on the P2 company website. P3's company website indicates, "Our dedicated team of logistic coordinators will always be available to ensure our customers' needs are met." Negative workplace behaviors may disrupt the ability to provide the expected service level (Keskin et al., 2016). P2 shared that the company addresses challenging workplace behaviors at the time of the complaint. "We will certainly speak with them at the time that we received some kind of complaint," P2 said. There is an expectation that the employees at P2's company put "on a good face" for the customers. P2 is referring to surface acting which is an expectation when dealing with customers. Surface acting refers to an employee acting positively or as if they are happy even in the face of negative customer comments (Prentice, 2016). P3 shared the expectation that workers should "smile through the phone."

Theme 4: Effective Communication

The one soft skill that P1, P2, and P3 identified as being important was communication. P2 stated, "It is essential to communicate what to do at the account to handle any issues." P3 shared that employees need to be "able to communicate to the customer." P1 stated that, "Communication is the most important soft skill to have. Verbal communication is important to relay the understanding of the difficulty of gaining new business due to the competitive nature of the industry." Research by Ellis et al. (2014) and Robles (2012) confirmed the finding that communication is important, as both studies cite communication as one of the top two soft skills employers need. The requirements of the workforce include the ability of the worker to communicate effectively and instantly (Jones, Baldi, Phillips, & Waikar, 2016). Increased global competition has enhanced the importance of employees' communication skills (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016).

P2's company employs workers who are on the frontline and visit customer sites daily. The daily interaction they have with customers accentuates the importance of effective communication. "Issues do come up because … there is a demand placed on them [employees]. They [employees] have to be in a position of being courteous to everyone and people may not be nice to them."

The ability of employees to adapt to their environment and communicate appropriately has the potential to affect business outcomes (Sony & Mekoth, 2016). Business managers expect employees to use their interpersonal skills to demonstrate such emotions as empathy and sympathy to unhappy workers at customer sites under the guise that the customer is always right (Prentice, 2016). Guillot (2016) concluded that workers should possess interpersonal skills, which are a factor for effective customer communications. A testimonial statement from the company website where P2 works is that "Everyone is very helpful and a pleasure to interact with."

Discussion

Application to Professional Practice

Logistics leaders should pay attention to the results of this study. Individuals with soft skills deficits and emotional behaviors could affect business outcomes. As the workforce mix (Bailly & Lene, 2013) and global competition increases, it is of paramount importance for businesses to employ individuals who have soft skills, and managers who are emotionally intelligent. The managers should be able to navigate through the issues that occur in the workplace, as well as set up the environment for training to gain efficiencies.

Soft skills training programs should include a focus on individual needs, group and individual training, a component to address emotional behaviors at work, and training on effective communication. Employers should determine the level of training offered to employees.

Recommendations for Further Study

A recommendation for further research is to perform the study using nonmanagement workers as study participants. The workers may have a different perspective on successful soft skills training strategies. We recommend that a larger study be performed to examine the relationship between the types of strategies for developing and improving emotional skills and the size or type of the organization. Responses from managers who work at a smaller size company may unintentionally exhibit bias from dealing with the behavior of specific employees in their workforce. A further recommendation for future research is to conduct the study in the same industry in another geographic location and compare the results.

The subject of training soft skills versus training emotional intelligence is also a subject for exploration. The focus for this study was successful soft skills training strategies. Altindag and Kosedagi (2015) indicated the desired soft skill outcomes may be achieved by training emotional intelligence. Further research is suggested to determine whether it is beneficial to train soft skills directly or whether emotional intelligence training should occur to achieve the desired soft skills results.

Conclusion

Some workers lack soft skills in the logistics industry (Anthony & Garner, 2016). The soft skills deficit includes oral communication, problem solving, low self-confidence, and interpersonal skills (Robles, 2012; Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012; Selvadurai, Choi, & Maros, 2012). The soft skills

deficit affects business outcomes including worker behavior, safety, engagement, and productivity. Companies are competing based on worker knowledge, which has enhanced the importance of worker hard and soft skills (Borghans et al., 2014). It is imperative that businesses develop and implement strategies for developing successful soft skills training programs to address the soft skills deficit. Failure to do so has far-reaching implications in terms of negative business outcomes in this highly competitive global work environment.

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