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Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills: A Case Study on Information Technology Employee Performance

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2022

MS, Life University, 2017

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Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial-Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and stress management in recent years have been seen as a new trend in organizations. Even though there is research demonstrating the importance of soft skills, there is little research on how information technology (IT) organizations are training and evaluating their employees in soft skills. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how human resources departments in IT organizations are training employees on soft skills and how they are evaluating employees' level of performance. The conceptual framework that was used in this study was Goleman's emotional intelligence model of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Semistructured interviews with four participants were used to gain a deeper understanding of soft skills in IT organizations. Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis revealed three themes. From the themes, four findings were developed: the importance of soft skills, soft skills increase job performance, soft skills include must include emotional intelligence, and soft skills evaluation. The participants provided their experience on how they trained and evaluated employees in soft skills, which in turn increased job performance. This study may effect positive social change by allowing employees the opportunity to increase their job performance and contribute to the betterment of their organizations. When employees increase job performance, they also increase their emotional intelligence, which builds motivation, communication, and self-awareness in the organization.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Idairis Campo, who was always there to support me when the journey was difficult, and the nights were long. At times, I thought of giving up, but you were always there by my side; thank you! Next, I dedicate this dissertation to my good friend, Alia Aboulhosn, who was always there to answer my questions and give me support when I needed it the most. Alia, thank you so much.

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Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Information technology (IT) organizations play a large role in society and other organizations through creating social relationships and meeting customer needs (Faik et al., 2020). In the past, IT organizations recruited based on hard skills (job-related knowledge and abilities), relying on human resources (HR) departments to train employees to meet organizational needs. According to Showry and Manasa (2016), despite these efforts, leaders within IT organizations are struggling to create a compatible and flourishing workforce by hiring and training employees using hard skills alone. In a recent survey, respondents representing 75% of participating organizations indicated that hard skills alone cannot help employees become successful in the workplace (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020). Further, 68% of HR departments reported that IT organizations are struggling to recruit employees with appropriate soft skills, those personal traits that help an employee thrive in the workplace (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2016, 2019). According to Stewart et al. (2020), reinforcing soft skills is the only way to incorporate integrity and applied skills and competencies in employees, which, in return, creates employee growth.

Lack of soft skills in employees is a growing concern for HR departments because these personal skills create teamwork, communication, and the ability to solve problems in the workplace (Szekely, 2017). Increasingly in IT organizations, HR staff are emphasizing the development of soft skills (Stewart et al., 2020). To determine the significance of soft skills effectively, more research needs to be conducted to gauge how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills and how

they are evaluating their level of performance (Rao, 2018; West Monroe Partners, 2018). In this study, I explored how HR departments implement soft skill training programs in IT companies and how they increase employee performance.

Background

Hard skills are always the primary skill set when hiring employees and measuring employee performance. However, Cimatti (2016) stated that although soft skills are highly desired among other organizations, many IT organizations do not recruit for these traits. Soft skills are not directly associated with the normal competencies connected to tasks and may be harder to measure. Though they can help a potential employee do well in job interviews, soft skills are easily overlooked, and many HR professionals do not deliberately interview for such abilities, creating a soft skills gap in IT organizations.

Even though both hard skills and soft skills are needed throughout IT organizations, according to Szilárd et al. (2018), soft skills are specifically linked to communication and teamwork crucial to IT organizations that work directly with customer service, sales, problem solving, and risk management.

While there is research on how HR personnel are responsible for hiring, training, and ensuring that employees are meeting the organization's hard skills needs, little research exists as to how HR departments are hiring and training employees in soft skills (Hendon et al., 2017; Tripathy, 2018). There is some indication that HR departments need help identifying and training employees in those soft skills that can increase employee performance (Karim et al., 2019).

Researchers have found that soft skills create positive impressions, decrease stress, and create positive relationships (Rao, 2018). Dean et al. (2019) also found that soft skills increase communication and problem-solving capabilities, which can increase employee performance. According to Szilard et al. (2018), soft skills are needed more than ever before, and more research is needed to fully understand the link between soft skills and increased performance.

Even though research has indicated the importance of soft skills, little research has addressed whether soft skills can increase employee performance in IT organizations. The aim of this research was to understand whether soft skills can increase employee performance and the findings that leaders within IT organizations may use in designing and implementing a soft skills program.

Problem Statement

IT organizations operate through strategic training in hard skills such as analytics, technical skills, and computer technology, which are acquired through education and can be measured to demonstrate performance and productivity (Baclar, 2014; Szekely et al., 2017; Cortada, 2019). Even though hard skills are essential for success, economic globalization and the emergence of a more diverse workforce have created a real need for soft skills (Lazarus, 2013). Due to advanced technology, tasks requiring hard skills are declining, increasing the need to develop soft skills to succeed in the workplace (Majid et al., 2019). Soft skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communication are now considered essential components to succeed in an IT profession (Szekely et al., 2017).

Despite this growing need, IT organizations continue to face shortages of IT employees who have well-developed soft skills (West Monroe Partners, 2018). West Monroe Partners, a national consulting technology firm, conducted a national survey with over 600 HR professionals/professional recruiters to understand the shortage of soft skills in IT professionals and its impact on organizations. One of the significant findings was that although HR departments emphasize soft skills during the hiring process, they do not cultivate their employees' soft skills once they are hired, leading to problems down the line.

A major one of these problems is the lack of collaboration and communication between hired technologists and other stakeholders (e.g., businesspeople and customers), interactions that are shown to increase the overall success of organizations. Additionally, IT employees' lack of soft skills reduces their likelihood of becoming leaders and team players (West Monroe Partners, 2018). Another critical finding in the national survey was that 67% of HR leaders withheld a job offer from a technologically qualified individual due to their lack of soft skills.

Researchers such as Meek (2018) and Rao (2018) have stated that the unmet need for soft skills in IT organizations is due to changes such as retiring employees, more diverse workgroups, and recent IT graduates without soft skills education (Meek, 2018; Rao, 2018). This is exacerbated by the fact that most IT organizations lack soft skill training programs, which might increase employee performance if implemented (Robles, 2012; Lazarus, 2013).

Soft skills may be acquired through employee training programs, and such training holds the key to increased performance and success in organizations (Robles, 2012; Weber et al., 2020). The question then becomes how to develop a training program suitable for the IT environment, and for this, more research is needed (Sriruecha & Buajan, 2017).

Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) suggested that IT organizations lack soft skills training programs due to a lack of understanding of the tools and methods used to teach soft skills and how to evaluate their success. Rao (2018) stated that some individuals still take the discipline of soft skills lightly due to the lack of research in this area. Hendon et al. (2017) also pointed to the dearth of research on soft skills used by IT professionals.

HR departments are responsible for training new employees and for the overall success of soft skills programs within an organization (Cimatti & Barbara, 2016; Deery & Jago, 2015). To measure the significance of soft skills effectively, more research needs to be conducted to understand how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills and how they are evaluating their level of performance (West Monroe Partners, 2018; Rao, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills, and how they are evaluating their level of performance. The findings of this research may benefit IT organizations in designing and implementing soft skills programs that can increase employees' performance. The findings may also bring awareness on which soft skills

such as communication and problem-solving skills are needed to increase employee performance.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework that was used in this study was Goleman's emotional intelligence model (Goleman, 1995). Daniel Goleman introduced a theory of emotional intelligence that involved five levels: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). Level 1, self-awareness, measures how employees use interpersonal skills to gain self-knowledge. Level 2, self-regulation, measures how well an employee can control and harness their emotions in the workplace. Level 3, motivation, measures how someone can do a task without receiving an incentive in return. Level 4, empathy, measures whether an employee is sensitive to the emotional feedback of colleagues. Finally, Level 5, social skills, measures the ability to create good working relationships and function well in teams.

Goleman (1995) was the first person to apply the rubric of emotional intelligence to job performance. Since that time, organizations routinely have been utilizing emotional intelligence for employee development. Goleman argued that IQ tests could not adequately determine individuals' intelligence, even though such tests were being used by many organizations and institutions for job placement. Instead, Goleman demonstrated

that emotional intelligence creates abilities in the form of soft skills that increase the performance and productivity needed to make an employee more competitive in an organization. Soft skills, according to Goleman (1995), are vital components of emotional intelligence that, when aligned with cognitive skills, will create a competitive employee. The framework of Goleman's emotional intelligence has been used by many scholars to demonstrate a direct relationship to soft skills.

Nature of the Study

For this qualitative case study, I collected data by using open-ended, semistructured interviews with employees working in the HR department in an IT organization in Southwest Florida that implemented a soft skills training program (Stake, 2000). The aim of this qualitative case study was to explore soft skills programs that may increase an employee's performance. (Bexter & Jack, 2008). Using a qualitative case study allowed me to investigate a phenomenon through the experience of the participants.

Definitions of Terms

Emotional intelligence: The ability to identify and manage one's feelings (Dean, 2020). Emotional intelligence was first applied to the analysis of a workplace environment by Goleman (1998) as "the ability to identify, assess and control one's own emotions, the emotion of others and that of groups" (p.18.

Soft skills: Skills that are learned through observation, personal experiences, and interactions and are considered nontechnical (Siddiky, 2020).

Hard skills: Skills specific to a job that are learned through education and training programs and are considered technical skills.

Employee performance: How an employee completes a specific task or job (Islami et al., 2018). In soft skills literature, employee performance has been used to determine the effectiveness of hard skill and soft skill training.

Training programs: Any training that increases a person's knowledge (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016). For this study, programs were used to promote soft skill knowledge and capabilities.

Assumptions

It was assumed that the HR participants would be truthful and share valuable information about their experiences training employees in soft skills. It was also assumed that HR participants would be good representatives of how soft skills prepare employees for success without demonstrating biases (Howson, 2019). Finally, it was assumed that limiting the study to one organization would allow for in-depth inquiry that would yield information not obtainable in a more cursory examination of multiple organizations.

Limitations

In that this study focused on only one organization, its results may not be broadly applicable. Likewise, this study was qualitative in design, and the sampling size was relatively small, with four HR employees. For this study, I gathered data from one section of HR versus the entire department, which may have limited the data being collected. This was done primarily to focus on the training section of HR. Furthermore, this study might have been limited if the HR participants themselves were not trained in soft skills, which might have affected how training programs were used to increase performance in employees.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative research may contribute to a deeper understanding of soft skills training programs in IT organizations and how to evaluate how soft skills to increase performance in employees (Dries, 2013; Cimatti, 2016). Research has shown the importance of soft skills and how employees may benefit from soft skills training (Ibrahim et al., 2017). The findings of this study may encourage IT organizations to implement soft skills programs that may increase job performance and ensure that their organizations remain competitive (Dubey & Gunasekaran, 2015).

This study may also benefit employees who are seeking a promotion in an organization by improving performance in nontechnical areas such as leadership. Ultimately, this research could create positive social change by improving employees' soft skills, which are essential to succeed in today's organizations (Patacsil & Lourrine, 2017; Rosli et al., 2017).

Summary

IT organizations represent an economic sector that generates over $3.7 trillion per year, according to Wilkin et al. (2016). As of January 2020, IT organizations employed and trained 3 million people to understand the impact of soft skills; how HR departments are training and preparing employees in those capabilities could point to new ways of increasing employee performance (Deshpande & Munshi, 2020).

Lazarus (2013) mentioned that hard skills alone are becoming insufficient due to advanced technology and changing workforces increasing the need to develop soft skills, which have become the key to success in the workplace (Majid et al., 2019). Despite the

growing need for soft skills, IT organizations continue to face shortages of IT employees with these abilities (West Monroe Partners, 2018). This study was designed to expand the understanding of how HR personnel in IT organizations are training and preparing employees in soft skills to increase performance. The findings of this study may provide information to IT organizations and stakeholders that leads to positive social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

An overall lack of soft skills and attributes associated with personality is considered the leading cause of skill gaps in IT organizations, affecting both HR departments and employees (Stewart et al., 2020). Soft skills in IT organizations, according to Deshpande and Munhshi (2020), are considered the most sought after and are critical for professional development. The HR department's strategic role in any organization is to practice high involvement with management to ensure that employees are meeting organizational goals (Lawler & Boudreau, 2018). Even though HR departments are highly involved in training employees, research is scarce on how or even if those departments are training employees in soft skills that may increase job performance (Lawler & Boudreau, 2018).

HR departments are responsible for training new employees and the overall success of soft skills programs within an organization (Cimatti & Barbara, 2016; Deery & Jago, 2015). To determine the significance of soft skills effectively, more research needs to be conducted as to how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills and how they are evaluating their level of performance (West Monroe Partners, 2018; Rao, 2018).

Literature Search Strategy

To investigate soft skills in IT organizations, a critical review of the literature was conducted using the following databases: PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, Psychology Databases Combined Search, PsycINFO, and Thoreau database. Also included in this

study were books and government publications obtained from Walden University Library through Google Chrome. All articles used in this study were peer reviewed and published within the past 5 years. Keywords included *soft skills*, *talent gap*, *employee performance*, *teamwork skills*, *organizational skills*, *talent mismatch*, *interpersonal skills*, *emotional intelligence*, *hard skills*, *organizational performance*, and *information technology.* Because there was very little literature on soft skills in IT organizations, the search was broadened to include Google Scholar and SAGE to access articles published between 2015 and 2020, using the following Google Scholar keywords: *soft skills*, *organizational soft skills*, *Kayek's social cognitive theory*, and *IT soft skills.*

Emotional Intelligence Theory

Emotional intelligence theory can be traced back to Peter Salovey, a Yale University professor, and John D. Mayer, a postdoctoral researcher. In 1990, they introduced the theory of emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to understand and process one's own emotions and those of others. An emotionally intelligent person can use feelings to guide thoughts and behaviors.

Daniel Goleman, a clinical psychologist, built upon the work of Salovey and Mayer, specifically applying it to a workplace environment (Dewey, 2020). Goleman developed a model based on research suggesting that most individuals make critical decisions based on emotions instead of reason. Goleman realized that organizational leaders, though they thought that they were basing decisions on educational expertise, were using a balance of both expertise and emotional intelligence. In 1995, Goleman published *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, arguing that a

person could better understand themselves by accepting emotions instead of discarding them, and thereby live a more meaningful and successful life (Goleman, 1995).

Goleman's model is based on five levels: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Level 1, self-awareness, involves the ability to see and understand one's moods and emotions and recognize their impact on others. Level 2, self-regulation, involves the ability to control or rechannel disruptive moods or emotions. Level 3, motivation, involves the ability to work towards goals and improvement without incentive. Level 4, empathy, involves the ability to understand other people's emotions. Finally, Level 5, social skills, involves the ability to create positive workplace relationships and build networks (Goleman, 1995).

Goleman's emotional intelligence theory was later used by organizations to identify non-technical abilities (soft skills) that promote emotional and intellectual growth through personal experiences (Salovey et al., 2003). Self-awareness is associated with confidence, realistic self-assessment, and an easy sense of humor. Self-regulation is connected to trustworthiness, integrity, and the ability to cope well with change. Empathy is linked to building and retaining talent, cultural sensitivity, and superior service to clients and customers. Social skills lead to persuasiveness, effective leadership, and a talent for building and heading teams.

Emotions are considered to be reactions to outside stimuli such as feelings, reasoning, communication, and adaptiveness. Recognizing emotions is considered by researchers as key to understanding why a person is thriving or struggling in the workplace (Deshpande & Munshi, 2020). To date, emotional intelligence theory is the

only construct being used to analyze emotions, empathy, communication, integrity, and values (Deshpande & Munshi, 2020).

Despite the rising interest in emotional intelligence, there is no generally accepted rubric of soft skills in the workplace, because there are so many different areas associated with emotions (Salovey et al., 2003; Rao, 2018; Dewey, 2020). According to Connolly and Reinicke (2017), appropriate behaviors are difficult to teach, as HR departments and teachers often do not understand emotional intelligence or how to measure soft skill performance. Connolly and Reincke's research concluded that soft skills in IT organizations are lacking due to the complexity of any organization's structure. Each hierarchical level of an organization requires a different set of soft skills, and to understand soft skills, HR personnel must understand emotional intelligence. To increase employee success, HR personnel need to fully understand soft skills and how to apply soft skills to everyday situations (Connolly & Reincke, 2017).

This research conducted by Connolly & Reinicke (2017) was limited because they looked only at team building, observing 24 students twice a week for 75 minutes in an active learning environment of a classroom over 10 weeks. The class was taught by an instructor who specialized in teaching soft skills, which served as the basis for the research. The idea of the research was to gauge basic interactions rather than productive work. The outcome revealed that perceived emotions were the primary form of information used by each person in the classroom based on meet-and-greet scenarios. Feedback from the participants suggested that each approached and introduced themselves differently. Thus, they retrieved different emotions from each person.

Connolly and Reinicke's research on soft skills in team development demonstrated that each individual perceives emotional intelligence differently, which suggests that soft skills can be difficult to observe and measure.

Research by Connolly and Reincke correlates with Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, which indicates that soft skills can be taught more efficiently through interactions with another person, event, or personal experiences than through abstract education (Goleman, 1987).

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness derives from emotional intelligence, according to Feize (2020) and Goleman (1987), manifesting as constant consciousness, behaviors, and thoughts that a person builds over time. Self-awareness is not innate but is a skill that develops and improves as time goes by, shaped by experiences from the past and present. Likewise, experiences from the past and present influence future behaviors, creating predictability that also increases self-awareness (Feize, 2020).

According to Feize (2020), an individual with high self-awareness behaves more professionally. Goleman (1987) explained that self-awareness is the process by which a person gains self-knowledge through their reaction to experiences outside of their control. Upon reflection, the individual can become more aware of their values and priorities, with this awareness acting as a buffer to rash responses to unexpected events, allowing the individual to become more successful. One key factor, according to Feize, is that self-awareness grows from the reaction of a person's traits and attitudes to stimuli in a specific environment.

Feize (2020) conducted qualitative research to better understand what an individual's perceived experiences might be and how they correlate to reality, which in turn may influence the depth of that individual's self-awareness. This qualitative study used 40 universities randomly selected in different areas of the United States. The research included 140 participants, consisting of 35 females and 105 males, the median age being 22. Feize found that each person had a unique experience, growing from an innate curiosity but affected by internal feelings such as transformation and invulnerability. Most participants reported that they consciously answered interview questions by drawing on past experiences, demonstrating self-awareness. Other participants struggled to answer specific questions because of a lack of previous experience. Many of the participants explained that they had grown up in environments where evaluating their behaviors was encouraged. Others explained that they had never been taught to evaluate their behaviors.

In the end, participants who were not taught self-awareness demonstrated disappointment, fear, and hopelessness in response to interview questions. Participants who were taught self-awareness demonstrated adaptability, happiness, and increased knowledge. Feize's research indicated that individuals who were taught the practice of self-awareness were more successful in adapting to new situations and increasing their knowledge, whereas individuals who were not taught self-awareness struggled.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is a psychological concept that measures an individual's behavior, emotions, attention to goals, and adjustment to social interactions (Backer et al., 2019).

According to Backer et al. (2019), self-regulation is the ability to control thoughts and behaviors associated with emotions. Goleman (1987) believed that self-regulation was key to an individual using emotional intelligence constructively. If individual possessed self-regulation, that individual was more likely to be able to set or reach goals, which in return created success.

Tseng et al. (2019) conducted qualitative research on self-regulation and soft skills to determine whether self-regulation can be taught and improved over time. The research used 162 participants, in four groups, to determine how the participants would evince increased or decreased motivation, social skills, and adaptability depending on changing stimuli. The average age among the participants was 24 years, and all participants had obtained an undergraduate degree. The results indicated that participants who had more self-awareness were able to practice greater self-regulation when asked how they would handle a difficult scenario in business. By contrast, other participants who did not practice or learn self-awareness were less able to exercise self-regulation and struggled to answer questions about how they would react in a difficult scenario. The outcome demonstrated that self-regulation does increase a person's ability to overcome and achieve goals through self-awareness.

Thus, Tseng et al. (2019) found that individuals who practiced self-regulation demonstrated more motivation and the ability to strive more to reach a specific goal. Self-regulated learners could better handle the negative stimuli that can decrease a person's ability to achieve. Goleman's emotional intelligence theory suggests that self-regulation builds on self-awareness, creating abilities that allow an individual to feel successful,

which in return can increase performance. However, more research is needed to fully understand specific aspects of self-regulation, such as gender roles.

Motivation

Intrinsic motivation has been described by Van and Ying (2019) and Goleman (1987) as a desire to perform without an intention to gain an incentive. In other words, a person who has intrinsic motivation seeks personal gain in the form of happiness or self-interest. Motivation is also believed to have a direct effect on job performance as employees can self-motivate to have a better outcome, according to Branscum et al. (2016). Many organizations use employee motivation, which is created by expectations that an organization will offer something in return for good job performance. Goleman (1987) contended that intrinsic motivation is key to emotional intelligence and may improve job performance. Intrinsic motivation, according to Goleman (1987), is a large part of emotional intelligence because employees with intrinsic motivation are not looking to gain an incentive but are seeking self-pleasure such as personal goals and passion. Research by Mayer and Salovery (1997) and Goleman (1987) supported that emotional intelligence in the form of intrinsic motivation could serve as the most important among employees, as motivation is the solution to positive attitudes and positive emotions and can suppress negative emotions.

Qualitative research was conducted by Schirf and Serapiglia's (2017) to examine emotional intelligence and work motivation to determine whether motivation can improve work performance. The research was conducted over 6 months and used a small group of participants who worked in the same position in an IT organization. Schirf and

Serapiglia's (2017) research demonstrated that employees who obtain emotional

intelligence in the form of intrinsic motivation have higher personal values, work ethics,

and the ability to adapt to high-pressure situations. Research also indicates that

employees who lack motivation demonstrate poor job performance, whereas employees

who are motivated to work tend to show better job performance (Schirf & Serapiglia,

2017). Even though the results from Schirf and Serapiglia's research demonstrated some

promising results, more research is needed to fully understand emotional intelligence and

work motivation.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to feel what another person is feeling (Ratka, 2018). Unlike

self-awareness and self-regulation, empathy is considered to be an innate human attribute

that occurs naturally. Ratka (2018) explained that empathy is hardwired in an individual's

personality or deeper cognitive area, where a person can feel bad for another individual.

However, Ratka also argued that empathy can be deliberately increased by developing

better self-awareness and self-regulation. Because empathy is an emotional response, it

can be honed by practicing better listening skills, trying to understand situations before

taking action, and create positive social change. Empathy has also been found to be

genetic and higher in women, and it can vary depending on the culture of the individual.

Research by Ratka (2018) addressed how empathy is expressed in soft skills to

determine if it can be taught as a cognitive skill to increase self-awareness. Participants

were selected from multiple businesses from different locations in the United States.

Each participant answered specific questions before undergoing empathy training.

Ratka's results indicated that all of the participants' scores increased by 40% after empathy training such as video recordings of scenarios, stories, and role-playing. The greatest growth was achieved in empathy training through role-playing. Even though research has indicated how an individual may increase empathy, more research is needed to better understand how empathy correlates with society and other soft skills.

Social Skills

Social skills serve as Level 4 of Goleman's emotional intelligence theory. This is the largest and most difficult area of soft skills, as social skills can be quite diverse (Hallam, 2015). Social skills are crucial to the success of a business, as effective employees need to build relationships with their manager, leaders, and other employees (Hallam, 2015). Social skills are a natural expression of empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation.

If an employee lacks the skills to forge a good relationship with the team leader, there is a high chance of conflict, which can result in decreased progress. According to Hallam (2015), relationships should be based on fairness, trust, and justice. Employees determine which social skills to use based on their expectations of others and the outside stimuli of the workplace. If these expectations are fulfilled with trust, a successful relationship is created (Hallam, 2015; Goleman, 1987).

The research was conducted on social skills to determine if interpersonal relationships in IT organizations are necessary for creating trust and teamwork among employees. Participants were selected at random and consisted of 20 employees, who were randomly grouped into teams of four to five members. Set up like a game, the

research was intended to determine the impact of relationship status on team activities such as marketing, sales, and planning (Hwang et al. 2018).

In the first test, strangers gathered into groups were asked to accomplish work tasks typical of a normal business day within a certain time frame, the question is whether they needed to establish relationships before being able to collaborate well. The games were played in three rounds over 20 days, becoming more complex over time. All the participants ended up improving their teambuilding skills and creating trust without prior relationship status. Most participants stated that they did not have time to build a relationship but instead chose to utilize social skills that assumed trust (Hwang et al. 2018).

The second test revealed that the participants failed in their tasks when not timed. The participants stated that they chose not to rely on trust-based social skills and, instead, tried to build relationships because they had time. The outcome of Hwang's research correlates with Emotional Intelligence Theory as participants, when pushed, used social skills that derived from self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy to make judgments as to whether or not they would trust strangers to collaborate on shared work. Even though research indicated that relationships are built on self-awareness and self-regulation, more research needs to be conducted to fully understand the connection between social skills and team building. Relationships, according to Hwang (2018), are very complex and many areas lack research such as the use of social skills with other soft skills and the role of relationships in more complex issues in the workplace.

Soft Skills

Measurement

Can soft skills effectively change the behavior and performance of employees in IT organizations? Deshpande and Munshi (2020) conducted quantitative research based on previous research by Khokhar and Kush (2009), testing different employees with high soft skills and low soft skills. Regression analysis, Cronbach's alpha, and Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used to measure soft skills cores to determine if performance could be predicted in an organization. The research sample size was 600 and the sampling method was a clustering method. The results revealed that some soft skills can be measured and do, indeed, dictate performance levels with employees.

While data analysis demonstrated that soft skills can increase performance in communication and relationship building, the data did not definitively prove that soft skills can increase overall performance. Traditional training programs from schools and organizations teach employees hard skills but lack soft skills. This has adverse results, such as breakdowns in communication and an increase in stress. Deshpande & Munshi found that soft skill training in the HR department was most beneficial to organizations and that HR should be the primary department to implement soft skills.

However, according to these researchers, more study is needed to fully understand soft skill training needs in IT organizations. The results of Deshpande & Munshi's research concluded that more research is needed to fully understand the role of soft skills in other performance areas such as individual performance, stress management, and

competence. More specifically, more research is needed to understand the correlation between soft skill training programs and performance.

Diversity

The need in today's economy for diversity has never been higher, according to Karim, Zaki, & Mubeen (2019). They defined workforce diversity as a group of individuals who originate from different cultural backgrounds and work together to create multiculturalism. Qualitative research conducted in 12 countries investigated whether there is a link between cultural diversity and productivity among employees in IT organizations. According to Karim, Zaki, & Mubeen, when an employee is comfortable that their background and culture are accepted, productivity increases. Research also indicated that HR is the area in which organizational culture diversity is developed and implemented throughout the organization.

To accomplish such workforce diversity and create multiculturalism in organizations, Karim, Zaki, & Mubeen, argue that HR departments must be trained in soft skills, such as communication, leadership, and diversity awareness. Soft skills such as communication are divided into two categories: formal and informal communication. Formal communication is the flow of official information through approved channels and routes. Informal communication is everything else, spoken, written, or gestured. Workplace multiculturalism changes the rules of informal communication, which is why it is so essential that HR train employees in soft skills in a diversifying environment (Karim, Zaki, & Mubeen, 2019).

According to Karim, Zaki, & Mubeen, (2019), organizational effectiveness can be achieved through soft skills like communication organized through HR training. Limitations of this research suggested that more research is needed to fully understand the consequences of informal communication in IT organizations.

Communication

According to Tripathy (2018), a lack of soft skills, such as easy communication, can cause an increase in stress among employees in organizations, particularly in IT organizations. Qualitative research was conducted to investigate soft skills and stress in IT organizations. The research aimed to answer the question of whether or not improved soft skills could decrease stress among employees. Stress in this research is defined as pressure, though stress can be a good and bad thing depending on the situation. Stress can encourage an employee to increase talent, inspiration, and passion if constructive.

Stress in organizations is created when diverse individuals work together and share different areas of expertise in the form of information and opinions. According to Tripathy, training in soft skills can enable employees to interact with diverse individuals through information and role-playing. Tripathy found that IT organizations without an emphasis on soft skills training can stop growing and develop problems with employee retention. Furthermore, adequate soft skills can be the determinant as to whether an employee grows in the organization or is unsuccessful. Tripathy noted that soft skills training programs have special areas, such as stress management, which can help employees positively handle pressure.

Tripathy concluded that soft skills like self-awareness help an employee identify their strengths and weaknesses, which helps the employee combat stress. These findings are vital to understanding the relationship between good soft skills and diversity in organizations.

Job Success

Rao (2018) conducted qualitative research with Fortune 500 CEOs and with the Stanford Research Institute International to investigate soft skills in organizations and their significance to employees' success. The findings indicated that 75 percent of long-term job success was dependent on soft skills and 25 percent was dependent on technical or hard skills. Data demonstrated that soft skills have proven to be useful in areas such as communication, productivity, stress management, and conflict resolution.

An emphasis on soft skill development in organizations not only helps employees grow in areas such as communication and stress management, but also nurtures leaders in the organizations through training programs such as self-awareness, adaptability, motivation, and conflict resolution. Rao found that employees best acquired soft skills through project-based learning and interaction with individuals trained in soft skills. Soft skills, according to Rao, are expressed in five areas: self-determination, social learning, self-efficacy, cognitive behavior, and self-theory. He noted that more research is needed to fully understand different areas that soft skills can improve through training programs. However, he was convinced that soft skills training programs had the potential to increase performance and conceptual skills.

Employee Performance

Rosli et al. (2017) conducted quantitative survey research on the impact of soft skill abilities on employee performance. The research sought to identify soft skill competencies that might lead to an increase in employee work performance. The researchers looked at 10 organizations and 1,200 soft skills trainees. Among the 1,200 trainees, only 260 participants were asked to answer the following questions: Does training effectiveness affect soft skills? Do soft skills have a direct influence on employee work performance? The study revealed that the relationship between trainer effectiveness and soft skills was significant, at 1.96, and soft skills acquisition significantly influenced employee performance by 0.79. The findings also demonstrated that soft skills have a direct effect on problem-solving skills.

However, Rosli, Ali, & Kazeem explained that increased employee performance is possible if the organization is set up to train employees. More research is needed to understand which soft skills have a greater impact on employee performance and to identify the optimal structure for effective training. Another limitation of this study is that it used a self-rated employee performance scale, which has many liabilities, such as exaggeration.

Human Resources

Human resources are considered the backbone of any organization that offers employee training programs (Battaglio, 2020; Ibrahim & Bakare, 2017). Over the years, HR departments have evolved from training employees in hard skills to soft skills which, in turn, improves employee behavior through self-motivation and self-awareness

(Battaglio, 2020). A case study by Ibrahim & Bakare (2017), found that soft skill improvement is now the primary objective for HR departments, but many HR employees lack appropriate training, making effective training of employees very difficult.

The independent variable used in Ibrahim & Bakare's case study was soft skill ability and the dependent variable was work performance. Soft skills were determined through the use of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, which was used to test an employee's competency levels. The research aimed to answer the following questions: Do soft skills influence job performance? Do soft skill training methodologies influence employee performance (Ibrahim & Bakare, 2017)? Impact on work performance was evaluated by training 260 employees in different areas of soft skills over a two-month training session provided by a professional trainer in soft skills.

There was an increase in soft skill abilities, such as being able to communicate their ideas more effectively, with the mean score moving from 3.02 to 3.87. The highest mean score was 3.87, which indicated that employees were more comfortable expressing their concerns in an organization without fear of retaliation.

Employee performance was also evaluated and showed an increase from 0.178 to 0.353. This increase was measured using multiple regression analysis to determine if soft skills and training methodology increased job performance. There was also a positive relationship between soft skills training and improved communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

Researchers stressed that, while the data showed that an organization could not determine if a specific employee's work performance would increase with soft skill

training, the organization as a whole should experience an increase in work performance if it invested in soft skill training. Soft skills did have a causal relationship with training scenarios and training methodology in IT organizations, according to Ibrahim & Bakare, which indicates that with proper training scenarios employees might be able to increase their work performance. However, the case study also revealed that HR departments were often unclear as to which soft skills needed to be improved in an organization, and, therefore, had trouble choosing training methodologies

Even though research by Ibrahim & Bakare (2017) concluded that it is very possible to increase employee work performance through soft skills more research is needed to fully understand if HR can efficiently train employees in soft skills.

Summary

The lack of soft skills in IT organizations continues to be a problem (West Monroe Partners, 2018; Rao, 2018). Although IT organizations are realizing the value of focusing on soft skills along with hard skills, many employees lack soft skill training, and IT organizations often lack soft skill training programs (Robles, 2012; Lazarus, 2013). Despite the growing need for soft skills, more research is needed to fully understand which soft skills and their precise relationship to improved job performance (Ibrahim & Bakare, 2017).

Previous research demonstrated how soft skills increased self-awareness, communication, teamwork, and self-regulation based on emotional intelligence (Backer et al., 2019). Ibrahim & Bakare (2017) highlighted that soft skills are crucial to IT organizations, but the nature of the link between soft skills and performance is not fully

understood. Further research can provide a better understanding of how HR personnel are training employees in different areas of soft skills, which may increase employee performance in IT organizations (Rosli, et al., 2017). Understanding how HR departments implement soft skills and how soft skills may prepare employees for success may well be the key to increasing overall performance in IT organizations (Deshpande & Munshi, 2020).

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Traditionally, leaders of IT organizations have focused on hard skills when hiring and training employees to meet organizational needs. According to Showry and Manasa (2016), leaders of IT organizations now find themselves struggling to hire and retain employees in an ever-changing workplace using hard skills criteria alone. Researchers have recently begun studying soft skills in IT organizations, as employees who demonstrate expertise in communication, self-awareness, and social skills seem to thrive compared to those who do not have these skills (Idrus & Abdullah, 2018). IT organization leaders recognize that they face shortages of both employees trained in soft skills and HR personnel who can train and assess soft skills that might increase job performance, according to Lyons and Bandura (2020).

More research is needed to better develop strategies to hire employees adept in soft skills, train those who are not, and assess both the success of such training and the impact of soft skills on job performance (Showry & Manasa, 2016; West Monroe Partners, 2018; Lyons & Bandura, 2020). New research could benefit IT organizations and stakeholders by leading to the development of soft skill training programs implemented through HR departments, which could lead to workplace success (Horstmeyer, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how HR personnel in IT organizations are training their employees in soft skills and how they are evaluating their level of performance.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

The purpose of this study was to better understand how HR personnel in an IT organization are providing soft skill training to their employees, and how they are evaluating their level of performance. To accomplish this, a qualitative case study was used, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of HR department practices in an IT organization (Stake, 2005). Understanding how HR personnel are training their employees and evaluating their performance can benefit not only an IT organization, but also those who hold a stake in overall organizational success (Grant & Keevy, 2019).

A qualitative case study was the most appropriate approach, as this research methodology allowed me to examine the emic, or inside, the phenomenon of interest of the HR department (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By looking at the system of meanings operative within the particular cultural context of an IT organization, a researcher can observe the reality that people experience and how people add meaning to their experiences (Taylor et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research affords a researcher the advantage of not only documenting what employees do, but also asking what significance they attach to what they are doing, yielding richer data (Taylor et al., 2016).

Various techniques can be used in qualitative research, according to Merriam (2016), such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. For this research, an instrumental case study was selected because it allowed me to gather data descriptively through an inductive investigation or bounded system (Merriam, 2016). According to Cresswell and Poth (2018), a researcher conducting an instrumental case study focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded system to demonstrate the issue. In other words, by studying one IT organization, a researcher can extrapolate to the larger issue of soft skill implementation in the IT work environment.

Case Study

A researcher conducting a qualitative case study aims to understand participants and make sense of a phenomenon inductively, going from the specific to the general (Creswell, 1996; Merriam, 2019). According to Woodside (2010), a case study "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within real-life context but more so when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear" (p. 2). According to Yin (2003), a case study should be used when the researcher needs to answer "how" and "why" questions (p. 545). A case study is also best used for studying small groups and organizations when the goal is to investigate a real-life, contemporary, bounded system by way of interviews, observations, and documents (Stake, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Applying a case study as the methodology helps in explaining how HR personnel in an IT organization are implementing soft skills training and how soft skills are being evaluated (Showry & Manasa, 2016; West Monroe Partners, 2018; Lyons & Bandura, 2020).

Role of Researcher

For this qualitative case study, my role as the researcher was that of an observer, which allowed me to gather rich data in the participants' natural environment and reveal insight into data otherwise inaccessible (Stake, 2014; Morgan, 2017). The primary purpose of a researcher serving as both observer and participant is to gain a deeper understanding of events as they are happening, which should yield insight into a participant's structures, processes, and behavior (Stake, 2014). Researchers who apply a case study often use the observer/participant model, according to Morgan et al. (2017), which is considered the most ethical method to gather data.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), managing biases is vital to qualitative research and can be accomplished by using reflexivity, a technique that reveals any values, experiences, or biases that may be brought to a study. I managed any biases by writing down thoughts, feelings, or assumptions that occurred throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I also ensured against bias by using no inducements and creating no situations that could unduly influence or disproportionately attract participants to engage in the study (Luke et al., 2018). Afkinich and Blachman-Demner (2020) stated that the primary purpose of using incentives is to attract participants, increase retention, or encourage participants to partake in research that they might not otherwise be interested in. To limit potential biases, I did not give an incentive to any participant in this study**.**

Methodology

Population

The population selected for this research was relatively small, as I aimed to have between three and five participants. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), using a small sample size is ideal when conducting a case study, as it allows the researcher to gather richer data. Participants were selected who were 18 years or older and who had more than 3 years of experience working in the field of HR training and assessment. Participants were not selected based on gender, as that was a variant that was irrelevant to the design of this project.

Sampling Strategy

I used purposeful and criterion sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling is used in case studies to select participants who have specific knowledge of the phenomenon or subject being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Criterion sampling was used to select participants because HR personnel in an IT organization are considered to be experts in the training and professional development of employees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Durdella, 2019).

Sample Size

HR departments are often broken into specialty subunits, such as talent management, benefits, HR compliance, workplace safety, development, and training (Lawler & Boundreau, 2018). The population selected for this research was relatively small, as I aimed for between three and five participants. According to Merriam and

Tisdell (2016), using a small sample size is ideal when conducting a case study, as it allows the researcher to gather richer data.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a semistructured interview (Roberts, 2020). I collected data using a semistructured, open-ended interview guide (see Appendix A) with three willing participants in the HR department. Each interview question was developed to gain information about the phenomenon of soft skills and job performance. Castillo-Montoya (2016) and Yin (2018) suggested four important considerations in developing interview questions: (a) interview questions must align with the methodology and purpose of the study, (b) interview questions must align with the research questions, (c) interview questions should reveal the lived experience or phenomenon, and (d) interview questions should evoke in-depth conversation.

Semistructured interviews are considered to be the best approach for qualitative research because this technique allows for more probing and follow-up questions (Tolley et al., 2016). Probing questions, those that encourage a participant to think more deeply about the subject under discussion, and follow-up questions at the end of an interview enable the researcher to gather in-depth data.

With permission from the participants, online interviews were both audio-recorded and video-recorded, to ensure that all details were captured. This research did not rigidly adhere to written or predetermined interview questions. Instead, I tailored questions to fit each specific interview, drawing from a basic framework of inquiry derived from knowledge of prior, similar research projects (Tolley et al., 2016).

Procedures for Recruitment and Data Collection

To ensure that sufficient participants were selected, I submitted a letter of intent via email to a local IT organization's HR department in the immediate area with my contact information. The criteria for participants indicated that they needed to be current HR employees who developed training programs for employees. Participants were also selected based on the location of their IT organization. Selected participants who responded to the letter of intent were given a summary of the purpose of the research and asked to sign an informed consent form agreeing to engage in interviews through Skype, Microsoft Teams, Facetime, or another video platform per the participant's request. Any potential participant who refused to sign an informed consent form was not included in the study, though they were thanked deeply for their time and for considering participating.

The data collection frequency was one interview per participant for the duration of between 1 and 2 hours, including member checking. This provided sufficient time for any follow-up or more probing questions needed to fully understand the participant's experiences. There was also sufficient time to begin with a short recap of the purpose of this study and to answer any questions that the participant might have regarding it.

During the interview, I audio and video recorded the interview, using Zoom. At the end of the interview, I personally thanked the participant once again for participating in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

All data gathered were coded. According to Sage (2014), coding narrows down gathered data into more manageable statements and observations, such as classification events, and is commonly used with qualitative case studies. During the coding of data, I reviewed all audio recordings from the interviews along with handwritten notes from the video portion. Once transcripts were completed, member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. This allowed me to ensure accuracy and identify any themes that arose from the interviews. For this research, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was used. This method applies to a variety of research questions and is flexible in "identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes" (Braun & Clare, 2012, p. 56). For each participant, the following six-phase thematic analysis was used.

Stage 1: Reviewing the Data Collected

This stage is the entry point and the best way to engage in the data overall while gaining insight (Terry et al., 2017). To do this, I read the transcripts multiple times while taking notes of any interests or common themes that might emerge. Additionally, I paid close attention to meanings and patterns that might emerge (Riger, 2016).

Stage 2: Generating Codes

I began to code the data by applying meaningful labels to specific datasets that were relevant to the research questions or emerged inductively (Terry et al., 2017). I tagged sections of data that were relevant and added meaning and interest to the research. Once all transcripts were coded, I moved to Stage 3 and began searching for themes.

Stage 3: Themes

Using the research questions as a guide, I began to piece together codes into themes (Terry et al., 2017). By building themes, I was able to see patterns and organize clusters of data by identifying similarities and relationships.

Stage 4: Reviewing Themes

At this point, I was able to determine which themes were relevant or irrelevant to the research. Each theme was carefully examined to determine whether there were coherent patterns and to ensure that the data reflected the research questions (Terry et al., 2017).

Stage 5: Naming Themes

According to Terry et al. (2017), stage 5 should include the pertinence of each theme and refine the themes about details and how the themes tell the story. A researcher should read the themes many times, which is considered ideal for producing credible findings. Likewise, reading the themes many times can help a novice researcher better understand what the themes are about and how they relate to the research questions.

Stage 6: Creating the Report

At this stage, a researcher writes a story based on the data analysis. According to Terry et al. (2017), stage 6 should include "concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting accounts of the data" (p. 45). I also checked the accuracy of direct quotes in the final report and analyzed the significance of patterns generated by the data, along with the implications of each theme. In the end, I theorized about how the story learned in

this case study shed light on the challenge of teaching and assessing soft skills in an IT work environment.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Nowell et al. (2017), There are many tools to use in qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness and minimize bias while yielding meaningful results. Among them are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

Credibility, according to Nowell et al. (2017), is the fit between respondents and representation and can be increased by way of member checking, prolonged engagement, observation, and triangulation. Credibility is also determined by checking preliminary findings with raw data. For this study, I used member checking by asking participants to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy and to ensure that what they said was what they meant to convey. Member checking provides the opportunity for a researcher to find errors and inaccuracies in the data collected from participants.

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability is the responsibility of the researcher to provide a thick description of the process, which reports not just a social activity, but also the interpretation of that action by those involved. In other words, a thick description includes the broader context. (Nowell et al., 2017). This can be accomplished by providing a thick description of the background, methods, sample strategy, and results so that the reader can determine if the findings of this study correlate with their conclusion.

Dependability

To demonstrate dependability, the report should include a traceable and in-depth explanation of why a certain method of data collection was used, based on the purpose of the study. The main idea of dependability is to leave an audit trail for readers to better understand the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). I will ensure dependability by explaining clearly how the research design is reflected in the research questions and how that design worked when applied in the interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability is established when the I can demonstrate clearly how interpretations and conclusions were made based on the data collected (Nowell et al., 2017). I will ensure confirmability by ensuring self-awareness and reflexivity of the research process and researcher role. This can be accomplished by taking in-depth notes and reporting about my presumptions going into the study, the interview process, and my observations and analysis.

<div align="center">

Ethical Procedures

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It is my top priority to ensure the protection of the human participants in this research. To this end, I will clearly explain the process and purpose of this study before asking participants to sign consent forms, including their roles as participants, their rights to withdraw from the study and confidentiality. I will take the time to answer any questions participants may have (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By taking these steps, I create transparency, which, in turn, creates the trust (Nowell et al., 2017).

Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning each participant a numerical tag, such as Participant 1, and will not at any point name the organization where the participants are employed. Each participant will be afforded anonymity and will be informed that all manual data collected such as paper notes and all electronic data such as voice and video recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Additionally, each participant will be informed that the data collected will only be reviewed by the dissertation committee and the researcher. I will destroy all manual, paper, and electronic data five years after the study is completed (Surmiak, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study will be to better understand how HR personnel in an IT organization are training their employees in soft skills and how they are evaluating their level of performance. A qualitative case study will be used to better understand the phenomenon of the participants within a real-life context. Participant selection will begin by contacting HR and will end with confirmability**.** This chapter addressed an in-depth overview of research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis plan, and ethical procedures including assurances and participant's rights. Chapter 3 also included the procedures from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the interview guide. Chapter 4 will discuss demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how personnel in HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills and how they are evaluating employees' level of performance. According to Dean et al. (2019), soft skills increase communication and problem-solving capabilities, which may increase employee performance. Additionally, according to Jardim et al (2022), soft skills allow employees to manage their attributes such as performance, relationships, and communication skills.

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

To answer the questions, a qualitative case study was selected because it allowed me to gather data descriptively through an inductive investigation or bounded system (Merriam, 2016). The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis, which allowed me to "identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes" (Braun & Clare, 2012, p. 56). Chapter 4 addresses the study setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Setting

This study took place online using Zoom, which was selected based on the participant's preference. Due to COVID-19 protocols, conducting face-to-face interviews was not possible. All participants and researchers were located in a quiet and secure location during the interviews and were notified that the interviews were recorded.

Demographics

This study was conducted using four participants who were over 18 years of age, were working in the HR department of an IT company, were working in training or program evaluations, and had more than 3 years of experience. The participants listed in Table 1 consisted of four females who were over 18 years old, worked in HR, were involved in employee training and development, and shared similar backgrounds in teaching and training employees in soft skills and emotional intelligence.

Table 1

Participants

	Age	Experience	Gender	Position
Participant 1	31	5 years	Female	HR training
Participant 2	36	10 years	Female	HR training
Participant 3	28	6 years	Female	HR training
Participant 4	40	15 years	Female	HR training

Data Collection

Once IRB approval (12-23-21-0749014) was granted, the recruitment process and data collection took approximately 7 months to complete due to scheduling differences and COVID protocols. Participants were recruited by emailing multiple HR departments in IT companies with an attached copy of the sample flyer. I also made phone calls to multiple IT companies to request participants for the research. Once an IT company replied with interest in the study, I emailed the company the letter of cooperation, which addressed the intent of the research and contained more in-depth information on soft

skills and emotional intelligence. As soon as the letter of cooperation was signed, the

participants were sent the letter of consent, which contained an explanation of the study's

purpose, procedures, nature, risks, and benefits.

Each interview took place over a video Zoom call, which was preferred by the

participants, and each interview call was audio and video recorded. Semistructured

interview questions (see Appendix B) were used, which, as Roberts (2020) explained,

allowed me to better understand the participants' experience of teaching and training

employees in soft skills and emotional intelligence. The duration of the interviews was

about 1 hour, and the participants were given time for follow-up questions and feedback

from the interview questions. Each participant was given a transcript about 3 weeks after

the data were collected for accuracy.

Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 3, data analysis for the interview and questionnaire was

conducted by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. This method

applies to a variety of research questions and is flexible in "identifying, analyzing,

organizing, describing, and reporting themes" (Braun & Clare, 2012, p. 56). Table 2

represents the six-step thematic analysis used.

Table 2

Six-Phase Thematic Analysis

Thematic phases	Process of each step
Phase 1: Reviewing data	Review data, gain insight, codes
Phase 2: Codes	Code data, organize, inductive method
Phase 3: Themes	Merging codes into themes and patterns and create
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Relevant themes and data reflect research questions
Phase 5: Naming themes	Continue analysis, refining themes into a story; remove irrelevant information
Phase 6: Report	Report findings of thematic analysis

Note. Six phases of thematic analysis derived from Braun and Clarke (2012).

Phase 1: Reviewing the Data

After data collection, I familiarized myself with the data by reviewing the transcripts multiple times from the recorded audio, personal notes, and observational notes collected during the interview process. I also noted any nonverbal gestures such as body movements, facial gestures, and body gestures that took place with a specific word during the interview process. Familiarizing myself with the data was also completed by reading and understanding each question and answer as it related to soft skills, emotional intelligence, and job performance. After I transcribed the interview recording in WordPad, I was able to read and underline specific words of interest, along with words that were not relevant to the research questions and repeated patterns. I also marked the text, highlighting certain words such as *emotional intelligence, soft skills, important*, and

performance. These words were marked for use at a later phase, as they pertained to the research questions the most. Once I felt that I was very familiar with the data, I moved to phase 2.

Phase 2: Generating Codes

I used an inductive method (see Table 3), which allowed codes to emerge from the data collected (Terry et al., 2017). Using the inductive method allowed me to break the data down from the transcripts into smaller sections and organize the data by using colored labels. This process also helped me to remember any information that I might have forgotten or missed earlier in phase 1. The inductive method was used to help me see and better understand the codes, which ultimately allowed me to understand the participant's experience and thoughts. Any code that did not repeat or seemed irrelevant to the research questions was set aside. I repeated this process until there were no new codes and moved to phase 3.

Table 3

Codes for Each Participant

Participants	Codes
Participant 1	Soft skills
	Emotional intelligence
	Training
	Roleplaying
	Success
Participant 2	Hard skills
	Soft skills
	Roleplaying
	Emotional intelligence
	Success
Participant 3	Soft skills
	Roleplaying
	Performance
	Emotional intelligence
	Communication
Participant 4	Roleplaying
	Soft skills
	Hard skills
	Emotional intelligence
	Communication

Phase 3: Themes

Once the collected data were coded, I moved from Notepad to a more suitable program, Microsoft Word, which allowed me to become more organized by using the highlight function and font colors. Microsoft Word also helped me identify and color code codes and themes. Microsoft Word also assisted me in arranging specific words by using Ctrl + F, which automatically highlighted specific words in different sections such as (EMO) as emotional intelligence and (SOF) as soft skills. As themes emerged from

groups of codes, I noticed patterns, and I noted them in detail in order for each participant. Then, I started to discard words, codes, themes, and other notes that were no longer considered vital to the research or the research questions. Disregarding irrelevant data made themes and relationships more evident (see Table 3).

Figure 1

Potential Themes for Each Participant

P1	P2
1. Success in the organization	1. Personal Experience
2. Evaluations	2. Evaluations
3. Communication	3. Soft Skills/Emotional Intelligence
4. Personal Experience	4. Training

P3	P4
1. Soft Skills/Emotional Intelligence	1. Success
2. Personal Experience	2. Evaluation
3. Job Performance	3. Training
4. Evaluations	4. Emotional Inteligence

Table 4

General Themes for Each Participant

Participants	General Themes
Participant 1	Soft skills made a difference Training/Education Soft skills increased performance Soft skills are connected to emotional intelligence
Participant 2	Soft skills increased performance Role-playing increased soft skills Trainers in emotional intelligence Training/Education
Participant 3	Soft skills correlate with emotional intelligence Performance increased with role-playing Emotional intelligence was important Trainers for soft skills
Participant 4	Special training in soft skills increased performance Emotional intelligence increases soft skills Role-playing trainers to teach soft skills

Table 5

Final Themes

Theme number	Theme description
Theme 1	Soft skills programs make a difference
Theme 2	Soft skills increase performance
Theme 3	Soft skills and emotional intelligence

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

All the data collected up to this point were reviewed multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the codes and themes. I ensured that each theme was relevant to the research questions and made sense to me. This allowed me to feel more connected to the story of the participants. After reviewing the themes, I merged the themes into larger ones, which helped me to understand the experience of the participants and validate their stories as trustworthy (Braun & Clarke, 2012). During phase 4, I asked myself whether the themes described or demonstrated a representation of the data collected. Additionally, in this phase, I reviewed the data, compared the data to the codes and themes that emerged, and disregarded any codes and themes that were irrelevant.

Phase 5: Naming Themes

In phase 5, I reread all data collected and transcribed to ensure that I was not missing any details that might change or affect the outcome thus far in the analysis. More so, I wanted to ensure that I truly understood that each theme aligned with the research questions and the participant's experiences. Phase 5 is vital to ensuring that each theme is relevant to the gathered data and that each step from phases 1–4 is repeated, according to Terry et al. (2017).

Phase 6: Creating the Report

In phase six, creating the report was completed by repeating phases 1–5, ensuring that I was using "coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting accounts of the data" (Terry et al., p. 45). During phase six, I was able to weave together the story and experiences, which led to an accurate description of the participants' detailed reports,

patterns, and themes. By using narrative and descriptive analysis to tell the story of the participants, I was able to answer the "why" and interpret the story, which helped me answer the research questions. Phases 1–5 allowed me to ensure that I did not fall into one of the three main thematic analysis issues mentioned by Braun and Clarke (2006).

First, I ensured that my research data collected were accurate and adequately inductively described the story. Second, I ensured that the data collected were adequate by using four participants, and I ensured that each participant gave enough data through their experiences and by answering open-ended questions. I made sure that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions. Third, I ensured that the analysis was convincing and valid by member checking and that the themes were not nonsensical. Phase 6 is very similar to phase 5, according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), who noted that the final analysis of phase 6 is a "continuation" of analysis versus a stage or phase (p. 853). For this reason, the final analysis will be discussed in the results sections (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012).

<div align="center">**Evidence of Trustworthiness**</div>

Credibility

Credibility, according to Nowell et al. (2017), is the fit between respondents and representation and is determined by checking preliminary findings with raw data. Using a triangulation method assured me that credibility was established through the use of interviews, personal notes, questionnaires, and member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using member checking allowed ample time for the participants to review and submit their final input for accuracy. Interviews were transcribed multiple times and

analyzed into codes and themes. Questionnaires were also coded and analyzed into codes

and themes. Using multiple approaches to evaluate the data assured me that credibility

and validity were accomplished.

Transferability

Transferability is the responsibility of the researcher to provide a thick description

of the process, which reports not just a social activity, but also the interpretation of that

action by those involved (Nowell et al., 2017). This was accomplished by providing a

thick description of the background, methods, sample strategy, and results so that the

reader can determine if the findings of this study correlate with their conclusion. By

doing so, the participants can fully understand the analyzed data and better understand the

phenomenon which in return increases transferability.

Dependability

To establish dependability, I utilized a traceable and in-depth explanation as to

why I used specific methods in this research to the participants. By explaining the

purpose of the study, data collection, and the research questions used, I was able to

achieve dependability and relate the information to all audiences according to Nowell et

al. (2017). Furthermore, explaining clearly how the research design is reflected in the

research questions, discussing the consent form, and interpreting ensured dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by data saturation, reflexivity, and when I

demonstrated clearly how interpretations and conclusions were made based on the data

collected (Nowell et al., 2017). This was accomplished by giving each participant ample

time to review the transcripts and provide feedback for accuracy. Each participant was also allowed to review and change the answers that were given during the interview process. Data saturation was another method used to reach confirmability. Data saturation was accomplished by comparing the analyzed data until no new themes came apparent.

Study Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills, and how they are evaluating their level of performance. Zoom interviews were conducted and lasted just over an hour per participant. During the interview phase of the research, I used semi-structured questions and followed a semi-structured guide (Appendix A) and utilized probing questions to gain a deeper insight into the story being told by the participants. The data collected from interviews, questionnaires, observation notes, and member checking emerged three themes concerning the central research questions (see Table 3). Central RQ1 - How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills? RQ2 - How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

Theme 1: Soft Skills Programs Make a Difference

This theme was developed when all the participants were asked open-ended questions during the interview (Appendix A). RQ1 How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills? Question 2: Tell me about your experience with soft skills training programs and follow up question B: What is the success of training programs? Each participant explained through their experience how they were

trained in soft skills and how they relate their experiences through their training

programs.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is currently employed in the HR department and teaches soft

skills to existing employees. This participant began the interview process by describing

her experience before and after she was taught soft skills, and how she relates her training

and experiences to employees. She described how she assisted in developing training

programs from her firsthand experiences:

Working in the human resources training and development arena, I can see a

dramatic difference between employees who are trained in soft skills and those

who are not. When I started training employees in soft skills 5 years ago, it was

apparent that they did not learn communication, time management, or how to

handle conflicts. Working in role-playing and training allows me the opportunity

to make employees better in ways they never thought possible. I teach soft skills

through active role-playing and training videos. The success of our programs so

far has been great. There are always individuals who do not work out.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is a current employee in HR and teaches and designs training

programs like soft skills to new employees. P2 began the interview by sharing her

experiences with soft skills and how she designs and trains employees.

My experience was life-changing in a way that many people would not

understand. I felt happy and excited to train employees in soft skills, which I have

seen make employees successful. I teach soft skills through role-playing and one on one scenarios. From my own experience, I have seen employees after their training session increases their awareness and grow skills such as increased work performance, and communication, and a become better employees overall.

Before I was trained in soft skills, I thought I was doing an excellent job working in human resources. But after many years of practicing soft skills, my success has increased and so has my job performance. One area in particular that I noticed is my communication and conflict management. When I teach employees how to address conflict or communicate professionally, they flourish and become that professional we all know is there. Another thing is that when I train employees to use emotional intelligence to overcome positive and negative feedback, I can see a difference. I would say yes that our soft skills training programs are highly successful.

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is a current employee who works in developing and monitoring soft skills programs in the HR department. P3 starts the interview with a personal understanding of soft skills and emotional intelligence.

So, I have six years in developing roleplaying programs and teaching soft skills. I train employees through interactive role-playing, computer programs such as scenarios based training, and communication examples. I believe hard skills like education/research are important however, I feel soft skills align with one on one experiences and emotional intelligence. I have seen how soft skills can increase

motivation, personal values, work ethics, and the ability to adapt to high-stress situations. Soft skills in my opinion are the way to ensure all employees are performing at their best. For this reason, I would say absolutely our soft skills programs are successful. I understand emotional intelligence and believe that you can not have one meaning of soft skills without emotional intelligence. How would you try to understand soft skills without emotional intelligence? In fact, during my training time with employees, we have an entire day on emotional intelligence, and how it is important to grow in the organization.

Participant 4

The fourth participant currently works in the HR department and assists in training videos and online platforms. This participant explained how her previous research in softs skills helped her to better understand how important it is for other companies to learn and teach soft skills.

Soft skills can be taught to any employee who is willing to learn, or at least I have seen this in success in our training programs. I teach soft skills through role-playing and group training sessions which include videos. Soft skills training in my experience makes a dramatic difference with employees in organizations who want to increase performance and possibly move quickly up the corporate ladder. In my year's teaching which is a lot, in my 15 years teaching I can personally say that it has made me very successful and increased my job performance. It has also taught me how to manage conflict, interact more socially, and how to speak with others, or should I say communicate.

Theme 2: Soft Skills Increase Performance

Theme two addresses the main RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills? Theme 2 emerged when questions were asked during the interview such as what soft skills do you teach employees? how do soft skills programs increase performance?

Participant 1

For our IT company, we teach a variety of soft skills. I like to teach social skills. Social skills help employees to overcome the fear of speaking, which can be an issue for our sales department. I also like to teach communication, which I feel is the most important. Lack of communication can create issues among the different departments. Lack of communication also creates an environment of hostility that does not exist. So, for this reason, I teach how to communicate in a language that is not threatening or heavy in tone.

After the participant finished explaining the soft skills that she teaches, she moves on and explains how she knows soft skills increase performance.

One way we see the soft skills increasing job performance is by observing the employee overtime. We can see the communication difference through emails, TEAMS, and written projects. I can also see how the employee interacts more professionally with others through handshakes, in-depth conversations, and most important an increase in sales. We also compare our observation notes from various times and situations. If our notes are impressive or better, we can conclude that our soft skills training is working.

Participant 2

I teach many soft skills but normally I will teach communication, social skills, empathy, and self-awareness. My favorite is self-awareness because it teaches individuals to think before they speak and review their actions before doing something. I also like to incorporate emotional intelligence with soft skills. What I mean is, that when employees are taught emotional intelligence, they tend to better understand soft skills and where to apply those skills. One way that I can see that soft skills are working is through observation and their evaluations every few months. Another way I can see soft skills working is by increased profits in the organization. Employees are meeting their deadlines and accomplishing more than before. I am sure that because of the soft skill training, employees have increased their performance.

Participant 3

I teach communication, problem-solving, leadership, and adaptability to all new and existing employees. I teach these soft skills to employees who do not have much experience or are recent graduates trying to learn the ropes in IT. I can see the difference before and after soft skill training in just a few days. I notice the difference when there are fewer problems in the teams. I also notice that communication is on another level meaning employees are using communication more. I would say that when employees learn adaptability and do not fear change, the organization seems to flow better and less drama. Soft skills improve

performance when employees learn something new and use that new skill to do
better for themselves and the company.

Participant 4

I teach all soft skills from communication to social skills and everything in
between. To be more specific, I teach skills that relate directly to IT and other
skills this company may need. For example, I teach how to communicate and how
to handle stress in the sales environment. I like to teach empathy and the values of
the employees. Soft skills increase performance when they understand how to use
soft skills. When I have an employee who lacks communication it not only affects
the employee but the entire organization. When this employee is put into soft
skills training and is taught good communication skills you can see the difference
everywhere which is increasing performance. When I think about performance, I
think of any way in which the employee has become better at something. So, to
answer your question, I would say that soft skills increase performance by
teaching them what they didn't learn in school and seeing the difference.

Theme 3: Soft Skills Must Include Emotional Intelligence

Theme 3 emerged and addresses the main RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT
organization evaluate their employees' soft skills? and sub-question: Do you think
emotional intelligence is important in learning soft skills?

Participant 1

In our organization we evaluate employees during their interviews. depending on
the position the interview may be structured differently but the fundamentals are

the same. We noted during the interview what soft skills the employee is lacking.

For example, we may ask the employee to read an email or a passage and have

them reply to the email or passage. Depending on the way the email or passage is

written may demonstrate if the individual has soft skills or not. There are other

ways such as Scenario. We could give the individual a question and see how they

respond with self-awareness or with empathy. More like an assessment test. I

know that emotional intelligence is the foundation to learn soft skills. If you teach

someone a soft skill with emotional intelligence, the person may not understand

how to manage the skills.

Participant 2

Evaluating employees can be done on many levels. For instance, we evaluate the

candidate during the interview process. We do not judge the individual on their

soft skills but would prefer if they had them. After doing this for so many years,

we assume all candidates do not possess soft skills or know about emotional

intelligence. I like to give the employee a soft skills assessment test in the

beginning and again six months after the employee completes the soft skills

training. I evaluate them based on their performance. If the employee makes a

higher score on the assessment after training, then that means their performance

increased. To what level depends on the level of the assessment. The assessment

process is broken down into groups with different questions or scenarios. I like to

use scenario-based training because it allows the participant to have a full range

of freedom to answer the questions. I feel we can collect more data this way and

use it later to improve our assessment. Do I think emotional intelligence is important in learning soft skills? Yes, I think you can't have one without the other. Emotional intelligence is the way perceive and process information which is important if you want to learn soft skills.

Participant 3

I evaluate soft skills by performance measures. We do offer an assessment test, but I prefer to start training employees if they do not have any idea about soft skills. What I mean by performance measures is how the participant carries out role-playing activities with other trainers. I evaluate the employee as they move through the training and if there is a section that the employee did not do very well on, they will either re-do the section or take part in another style of role-playing until the employee understands it. I guess this is where emotional intelligence comes on. Constructive feedback!!

Participant 4

Employees are evaluated through observation and assessment testing. When employees go through the soft skill training, they are evaluated on how well they perform. I do assessments in many ways. For example, I will evaluate the individual before or during their interview. Then, I will reevaluate the employee during their goal meeting or on their performance review. Employees are monitored over some time and in this case, soft skills would be a part of the evaluation. If the individual goes through our soft skills training program, usually we can see an increase in job performance, and this is noted during their

performance review. During our performance review, if we see an area that needs to be approved, we can offer more training in a specific area. I would say yes that emotional intelligence is part of Soft Skills. As I just mentioned, the employee must learn how to handle negative feedback.

Summary

Chapter 4 included an in-depth review of the setting, study demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the final results. The data was collected through in-depth interview questions that aimed to answer the following questions.

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

The study's results gave an extensive view of the participants and their experiences of soft skills and emotional intelligence. Research findings suggest that soft skills increase employee performance and must align with emotional intelligence. The transcribed interview responses demonstrate how soft skills not only increased performance but align with emotional intelligence. The findings also demonstrated how IT organizations train employees in soft skills. Furthermore, the participants in this study also demonstrated how they evaluate the performance of employees and how they evaluate employees' soft skills. Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how personnel in HR departments in IT organizations are training employees on soft skills, and how they are evaluating their level of performance. As mentioned in previous chapters of this study, both hard skills and soft skills are needed throughout IT organizations, according to Szilárd et al. (2018). However, soft skills are specifically linked to communication, empathy, problem solving, and job performance. Although there is research on how HR personnel, are responsible for hiring, training, and ensuring that employees are meeting the organization's hard skills needs, little research exists as to how HR departments are hiring and training employees in soft skills (Hendon et al., 2017). The findings in this study may benefit IT organizations by increasing job performance, which may increase overall profits. The findings may also benefit employees who are looking to increase their skill set in performance and communication, may help employees seeking to learn new skills that are highly desirable in organizations, and may promote new opportunities.

Summary of the Findings

The results from this qualitative case study helped me understand how the HR department personnel train employees in soft skills and how employees are evaluated in soft skills. The study results demonstrated four main findings: (a) the importance of soft skills, (b) soft skills increase job performance, (c) soft skills and emotional intelligence, and (d) soft skills evaluation. These results emerged from the research questions:

RQ1:   How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

RQ2:   How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft

skills?

Finding 1: The Importance of Soft Skills

During the research, four participants were asked about their experiences with

softs skills and training programs. Each participant told their story and shared their

experiences as to why soft skills are important to each employee and the organization.

One main difference that each participant encountered was an increase in self-awareness.

The participants explained through their experience how an increase in self-awareness by

teaching emotional intelligence increased how the employees perceived negative or

structural feedback on performance. The participants also described the employee's

attitudes as more positive as they understood the purpose of feedback. The participants

also explained how it would be very difficult if not impossible to teach soft skills without

teaching emotional intelligence. Research from Chapter 2 indicates that emotional

intelligence is the foundation of teaching and training soft skills (Zhang et al., 2022).

Finding 2: Soft Skills Increase Job Performance

The literature review revealed that soft skills may increase job performance,

which, in return, increases employees' value (Rosli et al., 2017). According to the four

participants, they could see an increase in job performance after soft skills training. The

participants were able to document employee performance through assessments and

observations. Furthermore, participants noted that the best way to see an increase in job

performance was through performance review before training and then after training over

6 months. The participants noted that even though some employees demonstrated soft

skills during interviews, they still went through soft skills training to sharpen their skills and help employees adjust to the IT culture. According to Sari and Amalia (2022), soft skills can be taught to individuals to increase qualities such as personality traits and habits, as well as to improve the conditions that can make a person's life better overall. The four participants could see improvement in employees, especially in communication and goals, with specific soft skill training. One participant, in particular, mentioned that depending on the soft skill training methods, employees had different outcomes.

Finding 3: Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is considered the foundation of soft skills and is described as the ability to make decisions, understand decisions, and understand a person's feelings, emotions, and reasoning, among many other traits (Sari & Amalia, 2022). Finding 3 confirms that emotional intelligence is the foundation of learning and understanding soft skills. The participants stated that for soft skills training to be fully understood, the employees must first understand emotional intelligence. For this reason, emotional intelligence is part of the soft skills training program. Participants mentioned that when soft skills training first began, emotional intelligence was not included, and the employees were confused. The literature also confirms that for an individual to learn soft skills, emotional intelligence must be a part of the training program, or the individual will lack reasoning. The participants expressed that without emotional intelligence, the training programs would either be longer in terms of more training, or the individual might not comprehend soft skills.

Finding 4: Soft Skills Evaluation

Teaching a soft skill is important, but how to evaluate the employee's soft skills is vital to ensure that the training is effective (Grazia et al., 2021). The participants all shared very similar experiences with how they evaluated soft skills with different employees. One main factor was that employees were evaluated before and after training, which gave the best indicator that the soft skills training was effective. In return, when the training proved effective through scenario-based assessments, employees' performance increased. The participants explained that they measured soft skills in four ways: scenario assessment, peer-review assessment, observation, and soft skills assessment test. Each test measures specific soft skills such as decision making, communication, self-awareness, and leadership.

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Limitations

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Most research has limitations, according to Kohler et al. (2022). There were three limitations presented in this study. One limitation was the sample size used in this study. Even though a case study uses three to five participants, using a larger sample size may reveal more experiences and stories of participants (Arrogante et al., 2022). The second limitation was that this research used one IT organization that trained its employees in soft skills. Investigating other organizations' soft skills training programs might shed light on other training programs and soft skill evaluations. In addition, this study gathered data from one area of HR versus the entire department, which may have limited the data being collected. This was done primarily to focus on the training section of HR.

Recommendations

My intention in conducting this study was to better understand how IT organizations teach and evaluate employees in soft skills. This study increases the understanding of how soft skills and emotional intelligence can increase job performance and brings new recommendations for future research. The findings of this research revealed that soft skills increase performance and should be studied further to better understand soft skills and performance. One recommendation according to the participants is to research different soft skills as they pertain to the job description. Extending research to better understand the different types of soft skills may be beneficial for other positions in IT organizations and soft skills training programs (Betti et al., 2022).

Another recommendation is to increase the sample size. This research used a sample size of three to five participants, in keeping with recommendations by Arrogante (2022). However, increasing the sample size could reveal new information on how soft skills and emotional intelligence increase job performance. This research was conducted as a case study, however, other methodologies could be used, which could increase the sample size.

Finally, despite the benefits of soft skills, further research should be conducted to understand the negative effects of increased performance with soft skills. Even though increased performance means better outcomes, at some point this may lead to burnout. Semaan et al. (2021) explained that persistent performance may lead to burnout among

employees. However, no participant in this study mentioned burnout during performance appraisals or increased performance.

Implications

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and increase the knowledge of how soft skills can increase job performance, and how soft skills are evaluated in IT organizations. Soft skills are important to train and improve employees' way of thinking (Cimatti, 2016). This study confirms that soft skills increase performance but can also change the way an employee perceives feedback through emotional intelligence. Goleman's emotional intelligence model indicates how emotional intelligence is the foundation of soft skills and can improve job performance. Goleman (1995) also contended that if job performance increases, other positive aspects will emerge, creating values, motivation, and self-awareness.

First, the findings could educate not only IT companies, but also other companies on how soft skills can increase job performance. The findings may also teach other HR personnel how to teach soft skills to employees. Soft skills training programs could be offered to employees to increase their skill sets and job attributes to allow them the opportunity to become more successful (Kamaeva et al., 2021).

Second, the research findings could be used to encourage college students and teachers to implement specific soft skills in leadership training programs. This could increase employment chances if students are better trained in soft skills, according to Tan et al. (2021). This research demonstrated many ways in which soft skills can be taught, and it presented how soft skills can change the lives of employees through better

performance. I believe that organizations can adopt soft skills training programs and make a meaningful impact.

Third, the findings suggest that emotional intelligence should be used as a foundation for soft skills (Sari & Amalia, 2022). The literature and study findings may encourage organizations to use emotional intelligence in their programs, which, in return, may increase performance. Teaching emotional intelligence is important when teaching specific soft skills such as communication, empathy, motivation, and goal setting. According to Tan et al. (2021), these soft skills are highly desired in organizations but may not be effective among employees if they do not understand why soft skills are needed in the first place.

Conclusion

Soft skills increase job performance. Soft skills not only increase job performance, but also have changed the lives of employees by allowing them the opportunity to gain powerful skills to make them successful. In this qualitative case study, two main research questions were developed (RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills? RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?), and multiple follow-up questions were used to better understand soft skills and training programs. These research questions used in the interview process allowed me to gain a deeper understanding through the experiences of the participants, who shared their stories of how soft skills had made a difference. Hearing these stories and understanding these experiences may change the ways that organizations teach soft skills to employees.

Through this research, I aimed to better understand how soft skills are taught and evaluated in IT organizations. The study findings have demonstrated that if training programs are conducted properly and with emotional intelligence, employees' performance will increase. This study also identified ways to evaluate soft skills, which may be the key to better understanding different soft skills and their outcome. Tan et al. (2021) mentioned that soft skills are extremely important in organizational growth and described how to measure soft skills. In return, organizational growth allows for more employment opportunities that support communities.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you for volunteering and providing information about your experience with soft skills and employee performance. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand how HR departments in IT organizations are training their employees on soft skills and how they are evaluating their level of performance. The findings of this research may be used by IT organizations in designing and implementing a soft skills program that can increase employees' performance.

Our interview should only last about one hour and will include a group of questions. With your permission, I will audio and video record the interview, so I can more accurately document your experiences. Please, answer all questions honestly, and at any time during the interview, if you do not wish to continue or are not comfortable answering questions, please let me know.

After the interview is completed, I will transcribe our conversations by writing out every word on paper to ensure the accuracy of the interview questions. You may request an emailed copy of the transcription and a follow-up phone call for question clarity or to add additional information.

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

1. How long have you been employed with the organization?

2. Tell me about your experience with soft skills training programs?

3. Does your organization teach soft skills to employees?

4. How do you teach soft skills to employees?

A. Programs, roleplaying, or trainers?

      B. What is the success of the training program?

5. What soft skills do you teach to employees?

      A. Which soft skills increase performance?

      B. How do soft skills increase performance?

6. Why does your organization teach soft skills?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

1. How important are soft skills for professional growth in an IT organization?

2. Which soft skills better prepare employees for IT organizations?

3. Which training program works the best?

4. How do you evaluate employees in soft skills?

      A. Test, roleplaying, or previous experience?

5. In your experience, do training programs prepare employees for success in an IT organization?

Are there any questions you would like to ask me? Or is there any additional information you would like to add at this time? I would like to thank you again for participating in this research. And as mentioned above I will send you a copy of the transcription.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

RQ1: How do HR personnel in an IT organization train employees in soft skills?

1. How long have you been employed with the organization?

2. Tell me about your experience with soft skills training programs?

3. Does your organization teach soft skills to employees?

4. Why does your organization teach soft skills?

5. How do you teach soft skills to employees?

    A. Programs, roleplaying, or trainers?

    B. What is the success of the training program?

6. What soft skills do you teach to employees?

    A. Which soft skills increase performance?

    B. How do soft skills increase performance?

RQ2: How do HR personnel in an IT organization evaluate their employees' soft skills?

1. Do you think soft skills are important for professional growth in an IT organization?

2. How important are soft skills for professional growth in an IT organization?

3. Which soft skills better prepare employees for IT organizations? How so?

4. Which training program do you find works the best and why?

5. How do you evaluate employees in soft skills?

Appendix C: Member Checking Protocol

1. Interview participants

2. Transcribe the video and audio recording

3. Analyze the transcripts using a 6-step Thematic Analysis

4. Have participant approve the transcription

5. Note any additional data from the participant