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Soft Skills Needed for the 21st Century Workforce

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Soft Skills Needed for the 21st Century Workforce

by

Susan A. Dean

MBA, Pennsylvania State University, 1999

BSBA, John Carroll University, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2017

Abstract

Technical skills are no longer enough for workers to compete in this highly competitive

global work environment. Soft skills are of paramount importance. A multiple case

study design through the lens of emotional intelligence formed the basis of the research

study. The focus of the research was identification of the successful soft skills training

strategies in the logistics industry. Three logistics organization leaders in the counties of

Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset, New Jersey, were participants in the study. Data

were collected through semistructured interviews and the review of company documents.

Four themes emerged through data analysis of converging multiple data sources: (a) the

use of a combination of group and individual training, (b) the identification of training

needs by individual, (c) the use of a systematic method to resolve emotional behaviors at

work, and (d) the importance of effective communication. The study findings may

contribute to social change by providing guidelines to use for setting up soft skills

training programs. The soft skills training program may be used to target disadvantaged

individuals who are unemployed or living in poverty. Improving the soft skills of

disadvantaged individuals may help them gain and retain suitable employment. Gainful

employment may have a long-term effect of improving their quality of life, while

reducing their reliance on social welfare programs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to the warehouse workers at 24 Applegate who gave me the opportunity to see the world through their eyes. The 24 Applegate warehouse workers showed me that neither an individual's socio-economic status nor past choices defines them. My life has been forever changed by my work experience with them as General Manager of the facility. I continue to believe in the abilities of each of the workers and expect them to continue to challenge themselves to do their best.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

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

Background of the Problem

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

Problem Statement

There is a shift in business to focus on worker knowledge to gain a competitive advantage (Wu, Lee, & Shu, 2013). The shift to worker knowledge has enhanced the importance of worker hard and soft skills (Borghans, Weel, & Weinberg, 2014). Fifty percent of employers surveyed globally identify workers with a skills gap to be deficient in soft skills (Hurrell, 2016). The general business problem is some workers lack soft skills. The specific business problem is some leaders in the logistics industry lack soft skills training strategies.

Purpose Statement

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

Nature of the Study

I based the selection of the study method and design on the research questions that were explored (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, there is no

defined data set used in qualitative research (Svajone, Gaizauskaite, & Valaviciene, 2013). The mixed methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative inquiry (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The method for the study was a qualitative method. Qualitative research results in an emergent design with a strong story (Bansal & Corley, 2012). A quantitative study represents a fixed approach and, therefore, is not appropriate. Mixed methods studies include more complex studies than other methods. The intent of mixed methods studies is to address data analysis through the quantitative approach and interpretation of the information through the qualitative approach (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The aim of the study was to investigate successful soft skills training strategies for workers in the logistics industry through interpretation of the information provided by the interview participants. A qualitative study design enhanced the ability to interview leaders in the field of logistics to gain a greater understanding of the successful soft skills training strategies. I determined a qualitative study design would yield the best results.

Case studies are used to investigate a defined group of individuals, specific area, or business process (Ridder, 2012). An extended study of a group of individuals with the intent of gaining understanding is an ethnographic study (Watson, 2012). A study based on ethnography would not be appropriate, as a goal of the study is to determine the successful soft skills training strategies based on the investigation of the interview participants. Phenomenological studies include the lived experiences of the individuals (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). The use of phenomenology is to gain an understanding of phenomena that is a normal course of a business outlier. The case study design is a more narrow focus and, therefore, the preferred design to use. Use of the case study design

resulted in the opportunity to study the soft skills training requirements in the logistics industry.

Research Question

The central research question for the study is: What soft skills training strategies do leaders in the logistics industry use?

Interview Questions

The interview questions for the study are:

1. What strategies exist for training soft skills in your organization?

2. What strategy do you consider most important and why?

3. What is your most successful soft skills training strategy?

4. What strategies do you use to overcome challenging workplace behaviors?

5. What soft skills do you consider the most important?

6. What are your strategies for dealing with emotional behaviors?

7. What types of workers have you observed with soft skills challenges?

8. What makes your soft skills training program successful?

9. How is the success of your soft skills training program measured?

10. What would you like to add that was not covered in the interview questions?

Conceptual Framework

The study was a qualitative case study that was designed to investigate the soft skills training strategies for workers in the 21st century workforce through the lens of emotional intelligence theory. The study of soft skills is important. Soft skills have an impact on every worker and business productivity (Kyllonen, 2013).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) first discussed the tenets of emotional intelligence. The definition of emotional intelligence is individual ability to identify their feelings, manage their feelings, and utilize the information about themselves and others to affect future behavior. In 1995, Daniel Goleman identified emotional intelligence theory (Goleman, 2005). The four areas of emotional intelligence Goleman described are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The four areas of emotional intelligence influence individuals and form the basis of their behavior. The three emotional intelligence models are the ability model, the mixed method model, and the mental model (Benjamin, Gulliya, & Crispo, 2012).

Emotions are part of an individual's personality (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). They can be either positive or negative depending on the circumstances. The use of emotions is to assist an individual with adapting to behaviors from diverse personalities. Emotions encompass the traits defining an individual's soft skills. Identifying and managing soft skills correlates to increases in employee productivity and organizational success (Benjamin et al., 2012).

Operational Definitions

Disadvantaged worker: A worker who is at or below the poverty line. The individual may suffer from unemployment; be unmarried with children, and lack interpersonal skills (Charles, Jones, & Guo, 2013).

Emotional intelligence: The ability of individuals to recognize their emotions and the emotions of others, as well as exhibiting of emotional control (Ybarra, Kross, & Sanchez-Burks, 2014).

GI Bill: Legislation passed to provide services to war veterans, which included educational opportunity, and physical and mental health care (Barr, 2015).

Hard skills: Technical skills including an individual's mental and physical capacity (Robles, 2012; Zhang, 2012).

Intrinsic motivation: Motivation originating from within an individual (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014)

Soft skills: Skills such as motivation, commitment level, and reliability (Parente, Stephan, & Brown, 2012). Soft skills are not technical. They include interpersonal skills such as communication, empathy, honesty, integrity, and a sense of humor.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are basic beliefs the researcher holds about the study based on cultural awareness (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Researchers should place importance on identifying their assumptions and biases to ensure the study is objective in nature. One assumption was the random sample is representative of the industry. A second assumption was the interview participants understood the definition of soft skills or nontechnical skills. A third assumption was the individuals understood the information that was part of the interview process, and they were willing participants without concern of retribution from their employer.

Limitations

Limitations refer to areas of the study that are constrained. There are areas of the study that are outside of the control of the researcher that could affect the study (Price &

Murnan, 2004). The focus of the study was on the soft skills training strategies for workers in the 21st century workforce. The interview participants consisted of individuals in leadership positions. The limits of the study included their opinions of the soft skills needed. Interviewing nonleadership professionals may elicit different feedback. Leaders may have a different perspective on the successful soft skills training strategies for the 21st century workforce than nonleaders in the organization. Their experience, education, training, and organizational culture form the basis of their perspective.

The soft skills training strategies required for the logistics industry may differ from the strategies needed in other industries. The perspective of the leaders may not accurately represent the soft skills training strategies required. Analysis of the existing workforce at the time of the study may influence the response of the leaders.

Delimitations

The researcher chooses delimitations and describes the boundaries of the study. The researcher determines which data to gather for the study and what parts of the information will be part of the final study document (Weiner-Levy & Popper-Giveon, 2013). The geographic area of the study is the logistics industry in the New Jersey counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset. The study included exploration of the soft skills training strategies for workers in the 21st century workforce in the logistics industry. The focus of the study was the soft skills training strategies needed for the 21st century workforce in the logistics industry from a leadership perspective. Participation by employees who are not in a leadership position may produce different results.

The study did not address technical skills. Examples of technical skills are trainable skills such as mathematics. The focus was on the investigation of soft skills such as motivation and communication. There is an increase in importance on identifying the soft skills related to managing the younger generations as the Baby Boomer generation has started to retire (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012). The skills needed to manage younger generations are different from the skills needed to manage the Baby Boomer generation (Treuren & Anderson, 2010). The results of the study may not be transferable to other industries or other geographic areas.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The study may bring focus to business concerning the successful soft skills strategies leaders use in the logistics industry. Chambers (2013) stated it is common practice in business to promote individuals into supervisory level positions based on their technical proficiency. He indicated technical skills are only one part of the requirement for a supervisory level position. Soft skills account for the remaining requirement for the individual to be an effective supervisor and leader.

A major issue facing business today is preparation for a changing world (Finch, Peacock, Levallet & Foster, 2015). Technology is influencing interpersonal relationships through the advent of mobile devices to communicate (Connell et al., 2014). The list of forbidden items in distribution centers typically includes mobile devices. Therefore, the demand for individual communication and interpersonal relationship skills is present to maintain a peaceful and productive work environment.

There is a projected gap in the workforce when the Baby Boomer generation retires (Chambers, 2013). It is imperative for businesses to develop their existing workforce as well as hire individuals who will be successful contributors to the firm to maintain a competitive advantage (Seetha, 2014). Identification of the soft skills training strategies is a first step in developing the existing workforce as well as for succession planning.

Implications for Social Change

Multiple groups of workers may benefit from soft skills development. Among the groups are individuals who are disadvantaged and those who are unemployed (Wozniak, 2011). Liu (2013) studied the Atlanta metropolitan area and identified a shift in jobs held by blacks and Latinos. They have a large representation in the lowest pay groups and are in need of skills development to enhance their pay rate. Determining the skills needed for employment is the first step in setting up training programs to address the issue. Skills training may contribute to the ability of classes of workers to obtain suitable employment (Mirchandani, 2012). Individuals may be able to support themselves and their families fully or partially through gainful employment. Doing so should result in a lesser impact on the social welfare system. It may also contribute to enhanced self-esteem of the worker.

<center>**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**</center>

The literature review is a central component of the doctoral study. The purpose of this study was to explore the soft skills training strategies for workers in the logistics industry. Marques (2013) stated there has been a change in corporate America.

Expectations exist for business leaders once considered weak for displaying soft skills to openly use soft skills in the 21st century workforce. An individual's technical skills are no longer sufficient as the demand for soft skills is increasing (Robles, 2012). Demand for individuals who have skills such as the ability to communicate effectively is on the rise with the individuals poised for success in the highly competitive marketplace (Lazarus, 2013).

The research approach taken with the study was to search the literature using keywords that included the terms *agreeableness, agriculture, body language, business history, capitalism, communication, cooperation, cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, enthusiasm, feminism, gestures, hard skills, human capital, interpersonal skills, knowledge workers, listening, management history, motivation, organizational behavior, problem solving, recession, social intelligence, soft skills, teamwork, technical skills, trust, unions, virtual teams,* and *written communication*. Walden Library database access accounted for 99% of the research channels in the doctoral study. The databases used were ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, Expanded Academic ASAP, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, Sage Premier, Science Direct, and Thoreau. The use of Google Scholar accounted for the remaining 1% of the searches.

The literature review results are in four sections. The focus of the first section is Emotional Intelligence. The second section contains a summary of the evolution of soft skills at work. The third section includes details about soft skills. The fourth section,

Workforce Diversity, expands on the different groups of individuals affected by soft skills.

There are 366 sources cited in the study with 331 or 90% with a publication date of fewer than 5 years from the anticipated study completion date of May 2017. All of the sources are peer reviewed. The use of Ulrich's Periodicals web search tool was the validation method used for confirmation of peer review. There are 185 sources cited in the literature review. All of these sources were peer reviewed. Of the 185 sources cited in the literature review, 164 or 89% have a publication date within 5 years of the anticipated study completion date of May 2017.

Emotional Intelligence

The subject of emotional intelligence has gained interest since the original introduction through the works of Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Daniel Goleman (Schutte et al., 1998). This is evidenced by the hundreds of results yielded from a search of the term in the Thoreau multidisciplinary database. Organizations interested in understanding the link between organizational performance and emotions have studied emotional intelligence (Chin, Anantharaman, & Tong, 2015). Companies such as Proctor & Gamble and Federal Express acknowledge and use emotional intelligence as the subject of training (Chee & Choong, 2014).

Ljungholm (2014) defines emotional intelligence as the way individuals respond to their environment. One of three emotional intelligence models categorizes the environmental response. The three models are the personality model, the ability model, and the mixed trait model (Ingram, 2013). The personality model applies to an

individual's personality traits (Ingram, 2013) such as agreeableness and empathy. The focus of the ability model is on an individual's traits. The mixed trait model is a combination of both.

The effects of emotional intelligence on turnover rate were the subject of a study by Siddiqui and Hassan (2013) who found low emotional intelligence correlates with a high employee turnover rate. Similarly, Dong, Seo, and Bartol (2014) found high emotional intelligence aided in the prevention of the negative feelings driving an individual to quit their job voluntarily. Emotional intelligence has been studied to determine whether there is any correlation between the impulsive activities criminals display (Sharma, Prakash, Sengar, Chaudhury, & Singh, 2015), and whether it influences the behavior of highly successful salespeople (Wisker & Poulis, 2015). In service organizations, it is customary to witness what Rathi (2014) refers to as surface acting, which is the forced emotional behavior of individuals who follow guidelines for how to act when greeting the public. A positive emotional experience for customers results in employee-enhanced feelings about themselves (Barnes et al., 2013).

Wisker and Poulis (2015) identify emotional intelligence as a component of soft skills noting the critical nature of the skills for work. While consideration exists for emotional intelligence in a positive work environment, Ybarra et al. (2014) stated the emotions of an individual in a negative work environment could result in a negative effect on the person's interpersonal skills. Emotional intelligence is the link between emotions and performance that drives corporate interest in the subject (Joseph, Jin,

Newman, & O'Boyle., 2015). Job satisfaction, motivation, interpersonal skills, and quality of life may affect an individual's emotions (Siddiqui & Hassan, 2013).

Weng (2015) stated emotional intelligence is one of three areas of intelligence affecting an individual at work. Social intelligence and cultural intelligence are the remaining factors. Researchers consider the intelligence theories to be similar in the construct (Hansen, Singh, Weilbaker, & Guesalaga, 2011). Crowne (2013) found emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and cultural intelligence related but not subordinate to each other.

The need for cultural intelligence has increased due to globalization and increased competition (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Yitmen, 2013). Cultural intelligence is the ability to maintain flexibility and react to culturally diverse environments (Yitmen). Individuals considered culturally competent exhibit the ability to interact successfully with individuals of different cultures (Eisenberg et al.). The competency is critical to organizational success due to the vast racial and ethnic group changes existing in society (Weng, 2015).

Thorndike introduced social intelligence before the existence of emotional intelligence (Riggio, 2010). Social intelligence is an individual's ability to manage social interactions with others (Zautra, Zautra, Gallardo, & Velasco, 2015). It is about understanding individuals and acting appropriately in social settings (Dogan & Eryilmaz, 2014). Di Fabio (2015) found there was a connection between social support and emotional intelligence. There is a close relation between the two constructs. Arghode (2013) stated an individual has a need for social intelligence, and social competence to

navigate social situations successfully. Alfano (2013) in his book review described an individual's actions as varying based on a given set of circumstances. Practical intelligence is the explanation given for the individual's action.

The Evolution of the Role of Soft Skills at Work

Individuals believe the United States is the land of promise where individuals can achieve the American Dream (Lorenzi, 2014; Samuel, 2013). Individuals in the United States and abroad have held high hopes of becoming financially successful. According to the American Dream, the road to success is through hard work.

The American workforce has changed throughout the years, evolving from the belief the American Dream was a reality to the present day where there is a lack of belief in an individual's ability to realize it (Hayden, 2013). Even so, the idea of work is associated with an individual's ability to attain the American Dream regardless of the personal costs such as loss of freedoms or dangerous working conditions (Crain, 2012). The basis of the definition of success in the early workforce was on an individual's hard skills that included the physical ability to get the job done. Intense global competition has resulted in an emergent workforce where soft skills are among the most valuable assets an employee can possess (Cobo, 2013).

In the early 1900s, considered as period of the first industrial revolution (Magnusson, 2014), men worked while women stayed at home and raised the children. The focus in the workplace was on mass production (Piercy, 2012). Workers had a specific job to perform which did not include their input. Physical labor defined the early history of work. Agriculture was the primary work vehicle in the late 19th century

(Phillips et al., 2013). Families contributed to work on the farm. The men of the household performed the farming work while the women tended to the children and chores around the homestead. Women existed in a subordinate role to their husbands. Cotton, tobacco, grain, and corn were among the main crops harvested through labor-intensive efforts (McPherson & Langham, 1981).

The United States was a world manufacturing leader until 2010 (Baily & Bosworth, 2014). There was often no need for additional management staff because the owner maintained control of the firm. As identified by Smith (2014) managers were predominantly Caucasians who were considered the only people capable of developing the workers. The business owners made the decisions for the company. The focus was on profitable business without a specific focus on worker's emotional needs.

The National Labor Relations Act passed in 1935 during the Roosevelt administration (Vieru, 2013). The passing of the act enabled workers to participate in collective bargaining that gave workers a voice. A key tool for negotiating leverage used by unions was the ability to strike. If workers had strong emotions about mistreatment at work, they could address their concerns with the union steward. Unions used strikes to stop work production as a means to force employers to bargain (Burns, 2012). Strikes were also helpful to the working class to gain upward mobility. Industries such as meat packing, automobile, and steel were unionized (Zelnick, 2012). Creation of management structures at organizations occurred during the same period (Magnusson, 2014).

Workers faced tough economic times during the Great Depression in the 1930s (Eichengreen, 2012). The unemployment rate increased to over 25% during the period of

the Great Depression (Armengol & La Mancha, 2014). The need for workers declined as

a result. The lack of available work threatened men's feelings of self-worth as families

developed an unfavorable view of individuals who could not find employment

(Armengol & La Mancha). Tax legislation enacted by President Roosevelt led to an

increased burden on entrepreneurs as they encountered higher productions costs (Vieru,

2013). Eventually, the New Deal legislation passed resulting in public works projects,

which helped to put unemployed people back to work (Barrett-Lennard, 2012).

Roosevelt, through the enactment of the legislation and the creation of a federal jobs

program, restabilized the economy (Tymoigne, 2013). During the 1930s consideration

for employees as workers first occurred (Piercy, 2012). At the same time, consideration

of human input as a factor in the previously designed manufacturing processes was

present. However, the approach to human relations in the workplace was driven by

statistics without providing for inclusion of soft skills (Child, 2013). It was a mechanized

approach.

      Unemployment returned to the 2% level during World War II and doubled to 4%

during the Vietnam Era (Wisman & Pacitti, 2014). At the same time, women joined the

workforce. They continued to fight for their right to work even though it often meant

working in less favorable conditions (Zelnick, 2012). The focus of corporations during

the period shifted from manufacturing to a consumer culture based on marketing

(Dowell, 2014). Researchers have indicated the introduction of women into the

workplace resulted in an enhanced focus on soft skills.

After World War II, GI's who attended college on the GI Bill resulted in a more educated workforce (Smith-Osborne, 2012). The educational opportunity for service members aided in the positioning of military members as qualified candidates for jobs. Service members disabled in the war were able to gain benefits through the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Veterans Act of 1943 which was more favorable than the GI Bill (Rose, 2012). Even so, the unemployment rate for military members has remained at a rate higher than the national average. A benefit of the GI Bill is workers had the opportunity to acquire soft skills during their schooling.

The Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 retained focus on the notion of full employment (Forstater, 2012). The idea was to put people into jobs where they could learn a skill and prosper. Although the overall unemployment rates were low, the rates for minorities were greater than the national average (Aja, Bustillo, Darity, & Hamilton, 2013). Individuals living in urban ghettos experienced higher employment rates (Ginsburg, 2012).

The entry of computers in the 1970s led to positive work changes and resulted in productivity increases (Zakrevskaya & Mastracci, 2013). The period marked the beginning of the third industrial revolution (Magnusson, 2014). The emergence of computers was a way to increase work efficiency without increasing labor costs. This period marked increased economic globalization and forced worker flexibility as lifetime jobs became rare. (Magnusson).

Gordon (2013) describes the feminist movement as a class struggle. The struggle was for women to overcome their acceptance of a subordinate role in a male dominated

workforce that left them with low paying jobs. Many were challenged to find work to help to provide for their families. Some were widowed or divorced, or their husbands may have been working away from the family home. Some women worked in white-collar jobs in offices and stores while other women worked as washerwomen in commercial laundries, as domestic servants, or in factory jobs with poor working conditions (DeVault, 2013). In the casino industry, allowance existed for white women to work in the areas visible to the public while immigrant and minority women often had to work in areas where they would be out of sight (Zelnick, 2012).

The presence of women in the workforce has to an extent altered how business is conducted. Women tend to exhibit greater empathy and stronger relationship building skills than men (Matsa & Miller, 2014). A view existed of women as weaker than men in physical labor with a stronger balance of soft skills. Although opportunities existed in the workplace for women, they did not always accept the role due to challenges of balancing home life with work (Sudha & Karthikeyan, 2014). Even though women work full-time, they often bear the responsibility for housework and rearing the children (Yu, 2014).

Millions of workers lost their jobs as a result of the recession that lasted for three years leading up to 2009 (Zhang, Peppas, Peppas, & Yu, 2015). Permanent job loss occurred for some workers (Abraham, 2015). The result was there were over 20 million people who were either unemployed or underemployed (Lorenzi, 2014). A correlation existed between the highest levels of job loss and the education level of the individual. The individuals without a high school diploma or GED were among the largest group of

dislocated workers (Hoynes, Miller, & Schaller, 2012). The workforce consisted of a diverse group of workers. They included both disadvantaged and dislocated workers.

Although society is transforming from an industrial-based workforce to a knowledge-based workforce (Etzkowitz, 2012), individuals have been showing a lack of interest in entering some professional areas such as information technology. Projections indicate a significant shortage in IT professionals by the year 2018 (Bailey, 2014). While organizations have been successful in outsourcing some IT functions, there is a continued need for individuals with IT knowledge who have soft skills to aid in interacting with customers (Connell et al., 2014).

The United States labor market currently faces new challenges. Illegal immigration existed for decades and illegal immigrant workers have typically worked in agriculture jobs for low pay and long hours. However, a new trend has emerged. There is new demand in Mexico for farm workers to stay in the country due to a decrease in the birth rate (Taylor, Charlong, & Yunez-Naude, 2012). The demand for farm workers in Mexico is causing a lack of farm work labor in the United States. Currently, the jobs consist of lower pay and require low-skilled workers. Finding new employees may require enhancing the positions, starting with an increase in wages (Smith, 2013).

Soft Skills

The soft skills identified as important in the workplace include communications, teamwork, motivation, problem-solving, enthusiasm, and trust (Chute, 2012; Ellis, Kisling, & Hackworth, 2014; Rasul, Rauf, & Mansor, 2013; Robles, 2012; Wahl et al.,

2012). Soft skills are critical to success in business (Dana, Hancock, & Phillips, 2011).

The wrong decision in a candidate can be costly to an organization (Velasco, 2012).

The ability to communicate is an integral skill for workers to possess. Pattillo

(2013) stated that management spends the majority of time communicating. Language is

the root of communication (Kahlon, 2013). It helps us to understand others emotions and

helps to form social skills (Benjamin et al., 2012). Forms of communication include

interpersonal communication, verbal, and written (Keyton et al., 2013). Listening skills

play an important role in the communication process (Pop & Sim, 2012). To be an

effective communicator, an individual must first be a good listener. An individual should

focus on hearing what an individual says, taking what they heard and drawing inferences

and asking questions to clarify any parts of the conversation either not heard or

misunderstood (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011). Organizational success correlates to

effective communication (Waldeck, Durante, Helmuth, & Marcia, 2012). Supervisor

listening exists as a key to employee job satisfaction, and positive organizational

behavior outcomes (Lloyd et al., 2015).

Belief exists that the use of gestures in communications is the result of the

individual attempting to express a difficult thought. Sassenberg and van der Meer (2010)

found gesturing is a response to a familiar thought and not related to the level of

difficulty of the current thought. The use of gestures aids the speaker in relaying the

message. Gestures are included as a part of social skills (Beheshtifar & Norozy, 2013).

Although gesturing is important, individuals can also form a perception of trust based on

the familiarity, bone structure, and expressions of the face (Tanner & Maeng, 2012).

Affectiva and Emotient are two companies that have created software algorithms to detect an individual's emotional state (Mone, 2015). The software includes an accumulation of the impressions of the human face. Use of the information gained from the impressions aids in the development of algorithms based on facial expressions, verbal cues, and gestures, which determine an individual's emotions (Mone). Anders (2015) emphasized the importance of nonverbal cues in communication. Anders further stated a bad first impression could take a considerable amount of time to reverse. Anders indicated individuals should be careful to ensure they maintain an appropriate distance from the person they are speaking with, as well as ensure they focus on the message they are sending with their body language.

Improvement in memory is the result of the use of gestures when speaking (Wagner-Cook, Yip, & Goldin-Meadow, 2012). The gestures enhance the recall of the speaker. Meaningful gestures aid the speaker while non-meaningful gestures do not (So, Chen-Hui, & Wei-Shan, 2012). Both adults and children benefit from the use of gestures as a form of communication (So, Chen-Hui, & Wei-Shan). Fay, Arbib, and Garrod (2013) found gestures are the most reliable form of communication in the absence of the use of common language. Early forms of communication originated from signs from countries such as Egypt, and China (Fay, Arbib,and Garrod, 2013).

In the virtual team environment, some of the traditional ways individuals communicate have changed (Elron & Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). It is not always possible for the team members to use visual cues, as they may not be able to see each other. There are multicultural differences each team member must understand. Violating the

differences via the use of improper communication methods can result in disaster for the team. Misunderstanding or misinterpreting the cues from global team members can also result in a negative outcome. Halbe (2012) posited the lack of body language due to a conference call versus a face-to-face meeting has resulted in a change in meeting structure. Halbe stated individuals participating in a virtual call must focus on voice intonation, and silence as a substitute cue for body language.

Individuals communicating through social networking channels such as Facebook face similar challenges. Individuals must possess strong interpersonal skills as well as use good judgment when communicating via social networking channels (Decarie, 2010). Corporations may hold individuals accountable for their representation on social networking sites as they consider the employee as an extension of the firm. Therefore, it is critical for an individual to use good communication skills.

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

Mascle (2013) provides an interesting viewpoint on written communication. She states there is too much focus on errors in the written word affecting the individual's confidence. There are cultural differences in communication resulting in the use of slang terms. Reliance solely on the correct use of grammar may affect the confidence of the individual including their self-esteem. In business, employee success has links to effective communication including written expression (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial employees learn how to communicate effectively.

It is common for individuals to deal with difficult personality types in business. The personalities could come from superiors, subordinates, colleagues, or customers (DeKay, 2012). The ability to manage the relationships successfully may result in a positive work experience. In fact, some corporations are using Situation Judgment Tests (SJT) as a method of rating interpersonal skills in individuals (Lievens & Sackett, 2012). The goal of the organization is to identify weaknesses in interpersonal skills and then provide additional workforce training as an outcome. The success of the workforce is partially dependent upon their interpersonal skills (Bedwell, Fiore & Salas, 2014). The lack of interpersonal skills may affect the ability of the worker to communicate successfully and get along with others. Extroversion and Agreeableness link to an individual's interpersonal skillset (de Young, 2013). Individual relationships between workers are important synergistically as they contribute to work social group culture (Hollenbeck & Jamieson, 2015).

Rasul, Rauf, and Mansor (2013) surveyed employers in manufacturing and found interpersonal skills were the most important employability skills. Interpersonal skills

include problem solving, communications, and teamwork. Individuals who lack interpersonal skills are more involved in interpersonal conflict. They may display hostility toward others (Moeller, Robinson, Wilkowski, & Hanson, 2012).

Successful teams have an association with individuals who work well together. Individuals who have similar extroversion characteristics within a team find greater satisfaction in group work (French & Kottke, 2013). Determination of team participants can include the use of personality tests to determine an individual's personality characteristics (Nickels, Parris, Gossett, & Alexander, 2010). An individual's emotional intelligence correlates to team effectiveness (Yeo & Carter, 2012).

Templer (2012) found an individual's job satisfaction has a potential link to their personality. Individuals have traits such as agreeableness influencing their perspective on work. Individuals who rate high in agreeableness are less susceptible to workplace bullying (Bashir, Hanif, & Nadeem, 2014). The individuals also had lower rates of workplace accidents (Beus, Dhanani, & McCord, 2015).

Agreeableness is one of the five areas of the Five Factor Personality Model that describe an individual's personality traits (Wang, Ngai, & Wei, 2012). Neal, Yeo, Koy, and Xiao (2012) utilized the factors of the model to evaluate the work performance in a quantitative study that included a 1,375-participant survey sample size. The most proactive individuals in their work role were the individuals who had high levels of conscientiousness and neuroticism. Individuals with high levels of agreeableness have positive attitudes about telecommuting (Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012).

Webber, Payne, and Taylor (2012) identified the importance of leveraging customer agreeableness. They posited the importance of maintaining the existing customer base in a service oriented organization due to the cost of losing existing customers. They also cited the importance of the establishment of trust in interpersonal relationships that agreeableness may contribute to attaining. Kim and Yoon (2012) found customer agreeableness was an important contributor to the relationship between the customer and the employee. A high level of agreeableness is also a factor in groups where an individual does not perform their part (Schippers, 2014). The team is more likely to cover for the individual who has not performed according to expectation.

Stoermer and Fahr (2013) studied the correlation between personality, and absenteeism using a German quantitative data sample of 3,948. They found the absenteeism of men did not correlate with their level of agreeableness. However, their level of neuroticism positively affects their absenteeism. Agreeableness does not have an impact on an individual's propensity to report their supervisor as abusive (Henle & Gross, 2014). Individuals rated low in conscientiousness and emotional stability were found to be the most likely reporters in the study that included 222 employee participants.

Individuals who are high in self-monitoring have a tendency to make themselves appear to have a high level of agreeableness when they are in situations where other people are around (Oh, Charlier, Mount, & Berry, 2014). When they are by themselves, they will do whatever they need to do to win. The activity may result in a counterproductive work environment.

The reliability and validity of tests used to identify an individual's level of teamwork have come into question. The Knowledge, Skills, and Ability (KSA) test used by multiple organizations is less valid than initially reported (O'Neill, Goffin, & Gellatly, 2012). Aguado, Rico, Sanchez-Manzanares, and Salas (2014) found the reliability of the Teamwork Knowledge, Skill, Ability Test (TWKSAT) was not confirmed and could be improved. Organizations actively use the tests to determine an individual's propensity toward teamwork.

Virtual teams exist to eliminate the geographical distance between team members in the business. The composition of virtual teams is individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The increase in the necessity for virtual work is the result of technological advances (Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012). Factors including lack of teamwork can impede the progress of teams set up for success (Berg, 2012). Teamwork requires interaction with other team members. Teamwork is essential for project achievement that can have a profound impact on the organizational success (Cottrell, 2011). The ability to work with teams ranks as the third most important soft skill for project managers (Wahl et al., 2012).

Teamwork is present in virtual teams and virtual environments such as online gaming. Trust is a key to successful teamwork in a virtual environment (Lee & Chang, 2013). Even the players in a robotic football game must achieve a level of teamwork and cooperation for the team to succeed (Chen & Dong, 2013). Individuals who possess agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness traits positively benefit from teamwork in a virtual world environment (Venkatesh & Windeler, 2012).

Professional development and project work have been useful to enhance communication and help with the teamwork initiative in organizations. Groups that formerly did not communicate were able to integrate successfully into team communication via the use of professional development (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). In complex projects, teamwork is beneficial as knowledge sharing is essential to the problem-solving aspects of the project (Liang, 2012).

Creativity correlates with intrinsic motivation (Grant & Berry, 2011). Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual. Intrinsically motivated individuals explore creative opportunities to contribute ideas. Pinto (2011) found an individual's wage does not affect intrinsic motivation. Deal et al. (2013) discovered the alignment of motivation is closer to an individual's level of the organization than it is with generational differences. The organization leadership affects individual motivation (Caillier, 2014). Lavanya and Kalliath (2015) found motivation did not affect organization citizenship behavior. However, an individual's intrinsic motivation correlates with organizational citizenship behavior.

Vandercammen, Hofmans, and Theuns (2014) found individuals who cannot differentiate their positive emotions had the greatest intrinsic motivational drive. For example, an individual who was happy but could not distinguish why he was happy was intrinsically motivated. Individuals who are aware of their emotions can exert more self-control over their feelings. Therefore, their feelings had less of an impact on their intrinsic motivation. The importance of the finding is the connection between the effects of emotions on intrinsic motivation.

Self-confidence and customer relations skills are important soft skills (Selvadurai, Choy, & Maros, 2012). Individual self-confidence is a factor in emotional intelligence (Perry, 2011). The individuals who believe in themselves may be motivated to make stronger work decisions. Likewise, individuals in what they perceive as a positive work environment will display positive work attitudes (Godkin & Allcorn, 2011).

Studying the collective behavior of ants provides a view of group problem solving. The creatures overcome challenging obstacles by pooling their problem-solving intelligence (Chen, Wu, & Chen, 2012). Individual problem-solving behaviors may result in increased self-esteem (Daniels, Beesley, Wimalasiri, & Cheyne, 2012). A shift in the manufacturing industry due to technology advances and globalization has resulted in a critical need for individuals with problem-solving skills (Griffin & Annulis, 2013). Critical thinking skills are a significant worker attribute (Ozyurt, 2015). They are more important than creativity in a study of 100 nursing school participants (Chan, 2013). In addition to critical thinking skills, critical problem-solving skills are important for constantly changing environments (Greiff et al., 2013). Attainment of problem-solving skills is a key to worker success. Sumi (2012) found men were better at social problem solving than their female counterparts.

Enthusiasm has a link to individual happiness (Mogilner, Aaker, & Kamvar, 2012). The definition of enthusiasm is the internal passion an individual feels about a particular subject or idea (Professional, 2012). The positive feelings at the core of happiness contribute to business success by greater employee contribution including problem-solving and work attendance (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Harmoniously passionate individuals have greater positive work satisfaction outcomes than individuals who are obsessively passionate (Thorgren, Wincent, & Siren, 2013).

Tackman and Srivastava (2015) found individuals who attempt to suppress positive emotions are viewed negatively by the individual interpreting the behavior. The explanation for the negative view is mainly due to a reaction that is adverse to expectation. A positive team experience has a link to individuals who have had a previous team experience that worked out satisfactorily (Eddy, Tannenbaum, & Matthieu, 2013).

The behavior of individuals at work may fluctuate based on their level of happiness at a given point in time (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Ilies, 2012). Workers in a positive state are more willing to be good corporate citizens whereas workers who are affected by negative work events are left angry and unmotivated (Erol-Korkmaz & Sumer, 2012). In a study involving college students, Flynn and MacLeod (2015) found a major factor in individual happiness is the person's level of self-esteem.

Integrity is an important building block for trust as managers must rely on the work of their subordinates to get their work completed efficiently (Katarzyna & Lewicka, 2012). Job satisfaction, productivity, and commitment were found to correlate with high levels of trust (Katarszyna & Lewicka). In international relations, trust is a cornerstone for garnering cooperation (Danik, 2014). Trust must exist first before organizations are willing to work together.

Top soft skills needed in the workplace based on a survey of graduate and undergraduate students at Texas A&M University include honesty and integrity (English,

Manton, Sami, & Dubey, 2012). Robles (2012) stated there is an increased demand for

honesty. He also identified integrity, communication, and a sense of responsibility as

needed soft skills. A mentor learns the skills while developing trust with their mentee

(Rekha & Ganesh, 2012).

Xu and Ma (2015) in their study of honesty found some individuals have to work

hard to resist temptation while the temptation is nonexistent for others. Xu and Ma

(2015) stated being dishonest takes more effort than being honest. In the nursing

profession, the ethics of telling small half-truths is in question (Drake et al., 2013). It is

the practice of some health practitioners to indicate everything will be okay when in fact,

it might not be. The Kingston University in London uses a five-minute honesty test to

address the concern (Nursing, 2012). Use of the test is to evaluate new candidates to

determine their level of honesty in stressful situations.

Individuals who may witness dishonest acts at work are at risk of a disloyal label

if they reveal the issues (Malmstrom & Mullin, 2014). In some cases, nothing happens

when an individual comes forward with the information about the dishonest act. Fear of

blame and retribution often deter individuals from making the right decision about being

honest (Patel, 2014).

Men have a higher propensity to be dishonest about themselves than women do.

In a study of 125 undergraduate students, Hogue, Levashina, & Hang (2013) found men

are more likely to create a personal image of themselves that is not valid, which is a form

of dishonest behavior. In the retail chain business, assistance in reducing employee theft

may occur by raising wages (Chen & Sandino, 2012).

There is an ongoing debate as to whether leaders are born or whether they can achieve leadership through training. A similar debate exists about whether leadership is a soft or hard skill. Boyle and Robinson (2013) stated leadership is a hard skill. Further, they noted the basis of leadership is multiple skills an individual acquires over a long period. Conyers (2012) indicated the foundation for individual cognitive abilities forms by the time a child is age 4. The cognitive abilities have an association with soft skills development.

A strong work ethic is associated with workers in America. It is a primary reason individuals want to immigrate to the country (McMurray & Scott, 2013). McPherson (2013) stated the focus of the work ethic should be on continuing positive values such as honesty, and integrity. Events such as what occurred on September 11, 2011, have worked to lessen the work ethic of Americans. However, Latino migrant workers continue to identify themselves with their strong work ethic (Hallett, 2012). In Ireland during the 2004-2008 employment boom, immigrants were the preferred hire due to their soft skills including their work ethic (Moriarty, Wickam, Krings, & Bobek, 2012).

Balcar (2014) stated the introduction of a focus on soft skills in the workforce may be partly responsible for closing the gender wage gap. The traditional pay for women is at a lower rate than men. However, women possess strong soft skills. The need for soft skills in the workforce has aided women in garnering higher wages. The value of older workers includes their higher levels of soft skills versus younger workers (Turek & Perek-Bialas, 2013). Organizations appreciate their loyalty, and reliability as

opposed to the favor of younger generations for their good physical health, and computer skills.

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

Workforce Diversity

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

The future for high school dropouts is unfavorable. In addition to high school dropouts, individuals released from incarceration have been subject to high unemployment rates. Formerly incarcerated individuals lack the soft skills needed for employment (Caputo-Levine, 2013). A main contributor to the lack of soft skills of

convicts is the difference in the handling of issues in prison versus the outside world. For example, a prisoner may stand with certain postures in prison to show strength. In the business world, the posturing reflects a poor attitude. Boyce et al. (2015) stated individuals who have been unemployed for long periods might suffer personality effects. The effects may include a lower level of agreeableness for women.

Estimates are more than 29 million people are participants in a pool of underutilized workers (Sum & Khatiwada, 2012). The workers are individuals displaced due to the recession who are underemployed, or no longer eligible for unemployment. The concern for the welfare of the group of workers extends globally. Former military workers remain in the pool of the highly unemployed (Faberman & Foster, 2013). The ability to master the English language in the spoken and written word is critical as well (Rahman & Yang, 2012).

In the current economy, the unemployment rate for college graduates remains at a lower percentage than nongraduates (Eisner, 2010). Even so, new graduates need to retain their focus on gaining the skills required by the business. The lack of skills is partly due to the perception of the soft skills needed in the workplace (Hodge & Lear, 2011). Rosenberg, Heimler, and Morote (2012) used a triangulated approach to survey the skills needed for employment. The most crucial skills needed for employment as outlined by faculty were interpersonal skills. Graduates identified leadership skills and work ethic while human resource managers identified literacy and numeracy as the most vital skills.

Overall logistics skills rank as a top requirement for logistician competency (Kovacs, Tatham, & Larson, 2012). Humanitarian logisticians work in situations where there is a need to transport humanitarian aid such as in the case of an earthquake in a foreign country. They must have the skills and ability to interact with different levels and nationalities of people. Therefore, soft skills are important to their success. In the field of logistics, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, customer service skills, and team orientation are the most important soft skills (Rahman & Yang, 2012).

Effective communications skills and teamwork are among the soft skills cited as a need for individuals working in the Information Technology (IT) industry (Chute, 2012). IT individuals need to be able to respond to a changing, global environment (Chute, 2012). Training is important to ensure IT employees possess the skills needed for the 21st century workforce.

Evaluation of job offers for Information Technology employees was part of a research study. Soft skills needs of motivation and enthusiasm are important to the IT sector in Austria (Wahl et al., 2012). Effective communication and the ability to work in teams are also important (Wahl et al.).

Soft skills are difficult to quantify resulting in the potential for a manager to make a subjective decision (Bailly & Lene, 2013). The decision may result in the perception of discrimination since the basis of the decision is the manager's reference point. The reference point may or may not be equivalent to the reference point of the individual under review. In the management realm, employees prefer a balance between hard and soft skills (Marques, 2013).

The question as to whether soft skills are inherent traits or whether they are trainable is subject to debate. Bailly and Lene (2013) found in their study of soft skills in the service sector that employers felt soft skills were not learnable. They described an individual's ability to be cheerful or possess a positive attitude as something that is inherent in an individual. The educational curriculum is under review at several major United States universities to address soft skills (Marques, 2013). The change is a confirmation of the belief soft skills are trainable.

Transition

Generational differences, the influx of immigrant workers, and the rapid evolution of communication technology have influenced the manner in which individuals interact with each other. It is customary for younger generation members to select nonverbal communication means such as texting as their communication mode of choice. The behavior is in contrast to older generations who still rely heavily on verbal communication. The emergence of a global economy means individuals must be poised to work with people of different ages and other cultures. Individuals must possess soft or nontechnical skills to survive in the competitive landscape. It is no longer sufficient to base hiring decisions primarily on hard skills. Success in the 21st century workforce requires individuals who possess soft skills. Therefore, it is critical organizations determine the soft skills needs for their environment. The focus of the study was to explore the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry. Section 2 provides details about the study. Specific areas include the rationale behind selecting the interviewees, the selection of the qualitative research method, as well the research design.

Section 3 is the presentation of the study findings. Identified in this section is how the

study may contribute to social change as well as recommendations for future study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes descriptions of the specific details of the study. Soft skills are important to the 21st century workforce (Dana et al., 2011). Soft skills are the nontechnical skills individuals possess. They are difficult to measure but are critical to success in the workplace environment.

Purpose Statement

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

Role of the Researcher

My role in the study was to explore the subject area in an unbiased manner. The study included a random selection of interviewees from logistics organizations in New Jersey. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative studies (Cope, 2014). I was the primary data collection instrument for the study.

At the time of the study, I was a management professional in the logistics industry employed in pharmaceutical distribution in Mercer County, New Jersey, and with general management responsibility for worksites including hiring, training, and mentoring associates. Interest exists at my place of employment in the outcome of the exploratory study, because it has a direct contribution to my work industry. Candidates from my current employer were ineligible to participate in the study.

I voluntarily adhered to the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. The Belmont Report principles provide the basis for human subject participation in research studies including the topic of informed consent (Strause, 2013). One focus of attention is on individuals considered vulnerable and unable to make decisions for themselves (Rogers & Lange, 2013). The Belmont Report mandates protection for the individuals in the group considered vulnerable is through adherence to strict ethical guidelines.

Maintenance of an objective focus throughout the study was important in my role as the researcher. That focus helped to eliminate researcher bias. I worked to maintain credibility by engaging with study participants, and being transparent in the conveyance of any information related to the study process (Cope, 2014).

Shepperd (2015) stated biases exist in the publication of favorable results over nonfavorable results. An individual reading the favorable results of a similar study may have a bias toward the positive result. My goal was to evaluate the data and report the actual result without regard to the results from other studies. Publication bias partly stems from the competitive job market for researchers. Individuals may be rewarded for favorable results, which can bias their willingness to publish negative results (Joober,

Schmitz, Annable, & Boksa, 2012). I received no compensation for the work, which should mitigate publication bias as it relates to the study.

Researcher bias can also result from the experiences of the individual researcher. Kooskora (2013) advises it is not feasible to eliminate all of the researcher's thoughts. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to remain objective in the selection of participants and analysis of the data collected. I remained objective when conducting interviews and collecting data by asking the interview subjects the same questions and accurately noting their responses. Maintenance of interview authenticity occurs by recording the interviews and transcribing the responses verbatim.

The most common data collection tool in qualitative research is the interview (Anyan, 2013). My doctoral study was a qualitative multiple case study of the soft skills training strategies for the 21st century workforce. Following the work of Paunescu (2014), data collection occurred via the use of interviews because they are a successful method of gaining information. The interview can be in person or via an online tool such as Skype (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). Cope (2014) stated qualitative researchers are the instruments for data collection. I conducted in-person interviews as a means of data collection.

Two of the in-person interviews occurred in a conference room, and one in an office. In line with Doody and Noonan (2013), the interview followed a semistructured format. There was a set of predetermined questions asked with the opportunity for me to ask follow-up questions. I described the interview process to the participant, had them sign consent documents, and invited them to ask questions during the interview (Doody

& Noonan, 2013). I intended that the interviewees feel comfortable sharing information in response to the questions asked (Ashton, 2014). A Tascam DR-40 digital audio recorder was used to record each interview. The audio recording of the interviews aided in ensuring data collection integrity (Berazneva, 2014). At the end of the interview, each participant received thanks for their participation and advised they would be contacted to validate the data collected during the interview process.

Participants

Warehousing sites in New Jersey were potential areas to find study participants. I randomly selected sites was from a list of logistics companies. I contacted the human resources departments of the organizations to invite participation in the study. Similar to James, Taylor, and Francis (2014), I sent an email to establish contact. The request of the human resources department representatives was to provide the names and email addresses of individuals who may be candidates to participate in the study. Following Hysong et al. (2013), the additions of individuals who were interested in participating in the study was used to update the interview schedule. Since there were not enough study participants gained by the method of reaching out to human resources, I attempted to reach study participants through networking contacts.

I initiated my effort to build a working relationship with the participants by making contact with them and inviting their participation in the study. Similar to Barnett and O'Brien (2013), I followed a practice of clear and concise communication. I reviewed the purpose of the study with each participant as well as provided a general process outline of what they could expect. I assured the participants of the study did not

feel obligated to participate in the study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I explained to all participants there was no obligation to participate and that withdrawal from participation could occur at any time. Transparency via open communication should have eased any feelings of obligation to participate. Trust is an essential element in communication (Elkins & Derrick, 2013) affecting the willingness of an individual to participate in the study. Individuals may be open to sharing information in an environment based on open communication and trust (Cheung, Yiu, & Lam, 2013). I explained the details of the study to participants to aid in the establishment of trust. Part of the communication included assuring the nondisclosure of personally identifying information of the participants (Mitropolitski, 2015).

The practice of full disclosure includes the description of the recording, a transcription of the interview and an analysis of the data (Killawi et al., 2014). I followed the practice of full disclosure by using the same description protocol. An essential part of full disclosure is that the individuals provide written consent to an audiotaping of the interview (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). Individuals may not appreciate a long interview process (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013) especially if they do not feel comfortable with the details. Interview participants received full disclosure of the details of the study and their rights as a participant in order to enhance their comfort level.

The sample population for the study was logistics industry leaders. They worked for companies that operated nonexclusively in the logistics industry in the New Jersey counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset. They had a minimum of 2 years experience in the logistics industry.

In-person interviews were the preferred method. Mitropolitski (2015) found individuals are more open to sharing their true feelings when they are in an in-person interview setting versus a focus group. Nonverbal cues are visible in an in-person interview setting as opposed to an online communication (Kang & Munoz, 2014). The goal of a qualitative case study is to understand the individual's lived experiences (James et al., 2014). The interview event provided me the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the subject matter through the voice of the study participant.

I expected three interviews to be sufficient to achieve saturation. The importance of sampling in a qualitative study is in capturing enough words from the interviewees until saturation is achieved (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The importance of gathering words for a qualitative study is in contrast to quantitative analysis studies where the number of data points is significant. Saturation in qualitative studies occurs when no new themes emerge in the data collection process (Walker, 2012). Schafer et al. (2014) found saturation in their study occurred when they received no new results after four consecutive interviews.

Research Method and Design

A researcher can deploy different research methods. They are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Starr, 2014). I chose to pursue a qualitative case study. The focus of qualitative research methods is on exploring the research question (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). The focus of a case study design is the understanding of the details surrounding the research questions (Wahyuni, 2012).

Research Method

The plan for the study was to use a qualitative research method. The study focused on the soft skills training strategies for the 21st century workforce in the logistics industry. Researchers use a qualitative method to interpret information while quantitative research focuses on the measurement of data points (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Qualitative research is emergent in design (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The outcome of the study was not predetermined. The study developed and the themes emerged based on the feedback of the study participants. The experience of every individual is unique (Collingridge, 2008) and should be subject to exploration. Therefore, the qualitative method was the best method to use in identifying successful soft skills training strategies.

In contrast to qualitative research methods, the use of mathematical and statistical interpretation occurs in quantitative research (Trafimow, 2014). The data expression in qualitative methods is in words whereas the expression of quantitative data is in numbers (Starr, 2014). The strength of quantitative research is in the exploration of data analysis and not people (Yilmaz, 2013). The type of exploration for quantitative research does not align with the intent of the study. My goal was to determine the successful soft skills training strategies used in the logistics industry. The utilization of a qualitative research method that is exploratory in nature aided in the determination of the successful soft skills training strategies.

Mixed method studies utilize the approach of analyzing multiple worldviews (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The combination of elements of both quantitative

and qualitative research methods characterizes the method. The researcher can address multiple questions with the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Christ, 2014). In a mixed method study, more complex research questions are addressed (Massengale, Childers-McKee, & Benavides, 2014). A mixed methods study was not appropriate for the study because the focus of the study was on exploring one worldview.

Research Design

The design of the study was a case study (Wahyuni, 2012). My intent was to understand the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry. The identification of the successful soft skills training strategies was through in-person interviews (Khan, 2014) of individuals who had experience in leading logistics workers. The understanding of the successful soft skills training strategies was conveyed through the responses of the interview subjects. Thus, a case study design was appropriate.

The additional options that exist for research design include ethnography and phenomenology. When an individual is interested in studying a culture, an ethnographic design type is used (Kelly & Gibbons, 2008). The researcher immerses himself in a specific community for a long period (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Cabantous, 2015). The focused immersion provides the researcher with an opportunity to observe individuals in a natural setting (Mannay & Morgan, 2015).

The choice of phenomenology occurs when the researcher's focus is on gaining information about subjects that others experience (Fendt et al., 2014; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). The intent of the study was to investigate the successful soft skills training strategies in the logistics industry. It was not an attempt to

explore the subject from the lived experience of the individual. Therefore, the best choice for the study was not the phenomenological design.

The justification for selection of the study was the focus of the logistics industry. Radley and Chamberlain (2012) described the connection of cases to each other via what they term as a virtual span. They indicated the information derived from a multiple case study was not sufficient for generalization across every area. However, the compilation of information gained from multiple cases is useful in drawing generalizations to other groups.

Taylor, Dossick, and Garvin (2011) share the concern case studies may not be generalizable to the population. The information gained from case studies may have limits to a specific case (Starr, 2014). For the study, the focus was on a subset of the logistics industry. While the qualitative case study is investigative in nature, the results could provide insight into the soft skills needed for the industry.

The achievement of data saturation in the study occurs when no new themes emerge (Marshall et al., 2013). The sample size for the study will consist of a minimum of three study participants (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). The sample size was sufficient to achieve data saturation as the basis of selection of the study participants was on their knowledge and experience in the subject matter (Robinson, 2014). The addition of participants would occur if needed until redundancy in the data occurs (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014).

Population and Sampling

Companies in the logistics industry comprised the population for the study. The geographic area for the organizations was the New Jersey counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset.

The intent was to use random purposeful sampling in the study. Random purposeful sampling involves purposefully determining a group of individuals suitable for the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) as it is not practical to target a large population (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigram, 2013). The researcher uses random purposeful sampling when the intent is to focus on a specific group (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). In the study, leaders in the logistics industry were the intended target group. It is imperative the individuals selected for the study be knowledgeable in the subject matter. Utilizing a purposeful sample should have ensured the interview participants were qualified to answer questions regarding soft skills (Coyne, 1997). Upon identification of the interviewees, I will randomly selected participants from the group. Following Guarte and Barrios (2006), the subjective selection basis is my experience.

The study consisted of three interviews with leaders in the logistics industry (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). The consensus in the field of research does not specify an exact number of interviews. There is a focus on an important factor in determining the number of interview participants, which is the ability to reach a data saturation point. The description of the data saturation point is the time when no new themes emerge (Francis et al., 2010). It is also important to ensure the interviews are lengthy enough in the process, so there is a collection of a sufficient number of words

(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The words are data points. Sufficient data points are important for analysis purposes in determining emergent themes. Excess data should not exist. The selection of qualified interview participants results in the reduction of the number of participants needed for study purposes (Mason, 2010). The goal of the study was the completion of three in-person interviews of qualified individuals. If data saturation does not exist after the interviews, additional interviews would have been added until data saturation occurred.

The criterion for selection of interview individuals included a minimum experience of 2 years in the logistics industry. The interview participants were leaders in the logistics industry. The selection of the individuals should have resulted in a knowledge base sufficient for the study. The individuals should have had the appropriate experience level to answer the interview questions based on their experience.

The goal of the interview process was to collect information from the study participants. The expectation existed each interview would not exceed a one-hour timeframe. The individual would not be limited to the timeframe if they had not completed answering the questions by the end of the time. The sample size for the study was three. The number of study participants for the study was sufficient to meet data saturation (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). The number of participants would have increased if needed to achieve saturation. The definition of data saturation is when no new themes or information emerges shown by repetition in the data (Walker, 2012). The use of open-ended questions in the interview process leads to early data saturation (Suri, 2011). The interview process for the study consisted of open-ended questions. In

qualitative studies, the focus is on data saturation, or depth of information, as opposed to multiple data points (Marshall et al., 2013). Follow-up questions existed during the interview process to aid in data collection. Morse (2015) stated the researcher must not act like a reporter. Instead, the researcher must focus on depth of inquiry and generalize their results.

The study participants were in a private location such as an office setting during the interview process (Khan, 2014; Yan & Webber, 2015). The interview setting was a site mutually agreed upon by the researcher and study participant. The interview space was quiet, so the interview participants were not distracted, or pressured to rush through their answers (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). The room will had either a conference table or desk and comfortable chairs. The interviews were audio recorded (Ashton, 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interview participants signed a voluntary consent form including notification of their right to withdraw from the study (Hardicre, 2014; Vanclay et al., 2013). Information provided to each participant identified the intent to record the interview (Vanclay et al., 2013). The placement of the recording device was on the table or desk so the interview subjects could see it.

Ethical Research

The research study conformed to the ethical research standards that protect study participants from harm (Schrems, 2014). A specific process followed to ensure the study participants fully understand the study parameters (Montalvo & Larson, 2014). individuals who elected to participate in the study were asked to sign a consent to participate form. Both informed consent and the full disclosure of the components of the

doctoral study aided the potential study participants in making a decision as to whether they wanted to participate (Moreno & Arteaga, 2012). The study participants could withdraw from the study at any time (Hardicre, 2014) by contacting me via email or by phone. The withdrawal of the participant would be via email. The plan for maintaining the study data is for it to be in a secure format for 5 years after completion of the study. Security of the data will aid in ensuring the maintenance of the data confidentiality (Vanclay et al., 2013). The secure format includes the data source located in a secure, locked location accessible by me. The plan for data storage included the use of an SD card. Cloud storage was not an option. The risk of vulnerabilities when using cloud storage were greater than using an SD card for data storage (Juels & Oprea, 2013). The rights of the participants were protected and will remain confidential. The names of the individuals and the organizations they work for are strictly confidential. I am the only individual who has access to the information in addition to the Walden Institutional Review board and my study chair. The anonymity of each study participant took place by assigning a random number to each. Any reference to actual statements made during the data collection process indicates the random number of the individual and not their personal information. Shuchman (2014) assigned pseudonym names to interviewees in a Canadian study. Similarly, a random number was the pseudonym for the interview participant. The final doctoral study manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number. The IRB approval number for this study is 10-26-16-0335961.

Data Collection Instrument

The intent was to have two forms of data collection for the multiple case study (Dasgupta, 2015). Cope (2014) stated the primary data collection instrument for a qualitative study is the researcher. I was the primary data collection instrument for the study. Following the work of Smith, Cornella, and Williams (2014) and Truglio-Londrigan (2013) face-to-face semistructured interviews were used for data collection. A list of the interview questions appears in Appendix A. Recording of qualitative interviews aids in interview recall (Ashton, 2014; Bayat Bodaghi, Binti Awang-Ngah, & Abdullah, 2014; Smith, Cornella, & Williams, 2014). A Tascam DR-40 digital recorder device was used to record the interviews. A notebook contains the written notes taken during the interview (Bigby, Frawley, & Ramcharan, 2014; Mitropolitski, 2015; Orbach, Lamb, La Rooy, & Pipe, 2012). Use of the information gathered on the digital recorder, and the interview notes were used to interpret the results of the interview process. The instruments aided in the collection of data for analysis in the doctoral study. A list of the interview process steps is contained in the interview protocol in Appendix B. The secondary form of data for the study was company documents (Houghton et al., 2013: Ridder, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). The source of the data was from the individual who agreed to an interview for the study or from searching the internet for organizational information.

The reliability of a study refers to the repeatability of it using the same process under the same conditions (Bastos et al., 2014). Reliability reinforces the validity of the study. Member checking was used to confirm the reliability and validity of the study data

(Bayat Bodaghi, Binti Awang-Ngah, & Abdullah, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, &
Murphy, 2013; Smith, Cornella, & Williams, 2014).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques include semistructured face-to-face interviews with
each of the study participants (Mazaheri et al., 2013; Schafer et al., 2014; Stringer,
Astrakianakis, & Haines, 2013). The study participant met at an agreed upon site and a
semistructured face-to-face interview performed. The interview took place in a private
room such as an office or a conference room (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Khan, 2014; van
Schaik, O'Brien, Almeida, & Adler, 2014). Once the individual agreed to the study,
understood their right to withdraw at any time, and agreed to the audio recording, the
interview process began (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012; Hardicre, 2014; Vanclay et al.,
2013). Each interview participant answered the questions listed in Appendix A. The
asking of follow-up questions occurred to obtain additional information and to clarify
responses. During the interview, notes were taken and written in a notebook I used for
the analysis. Within one week of the interview with each interview participant, member
checking was utilized. Preparation and sending of an email to the study participants with
my interpretation of the information they shared in the interview occurred (Al-Kadri, Al-
Kadi, & Van Der Vleuten, 2013; Peeraer & Stalmeijer, 2014; van Schaik, O'Brien,
Almeida, & Adler). Per a written request, the individual reviewed the information sent,
clarified any incorrect items, and then resubmitted the document to me.

The benefits of using face-to-face interviews include the ability of the researcher
to ask follow-up questions (Cassidy, Sherman, & Jones, 2012). The interview participant

may also feel more open to sharing information in a face-to-face interview as opposed to a larger group (Mitropolitski, 2015; Reczek, 2014). The interview provides a method of study participation for individuals who cannot read or write effectively (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

A disadvantage of using interviews as a data collection technique is the individuals may act differently during an interview than they normally do (Al-Yateem, 2012). The opportunity for bias on the part of the researcher and study participant exists. The bias may be from an individual's appearance or class structure (Mellor, Ingram, Abrahams, & Beedell, 2014). Individuals may feel the interviews are too intrusive (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013).

Data Organization Technique

Use of a Tascam DR-40 digital voice recorder was in place to record the interviews as part of the study. The device records onto an SD card. There was one SD card for the interviews. An envelope with the interviewee's synonym name and the date of the interview printed on the outside of the envelope houses the SD card.

A secured container holds the data collected in the study for 5 years (Lustgarten, 2015; Mazaheri et al., 2013; Vanclay et al., 2013). The data includes the digital voice recording on the SD card, as well as the research log. The log includes the interviewee's names, and details of the interview (Crothers, 2014). In line with Cope (2014), I recorded interview notes in the log. The document indicating the cross reference between the interviewee's synonym name and their actual name is in the secure container and held in confidence (Beskow et al., 2012; Elger, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative study is an important process that should not be overly simplified (Dierckx de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). Hallberg (2012) stated that qualitative research is subject to replication. The opportunity for replication to occur is through the researcher's detailed descriptions of the processes followed (Vanclay et al., 2013).

I analyzed the data through the method of data triangulation. The data triangulation process takes place through the collection of multiple sources of information that are analyzed (Aubin-Auger et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2014; Lin, Wu, & Tsai, 2012). Two sources of data were subject to review for this multiple case study when available. The first source of information was the interview data. The second source of information was a review of company documentation. There was no secondary information available for company associated with interview participant 2 (P2).

The Qualtitative Analysis Guide of Leuven (QUAGOL) is an outline for qualitative study data analysis (Apers et al., 2016; Dierckx de Casterle et al., 2012; Tiedtke, Rijk, & Dierckx de Casterle, 2014). I followed the steps outlined in the guide for data analysis in this multiple case study. Continual review and comparison of data occurred through the process. Correlation of the current research and the conceptual framework with the themes identified occurred via use of coding software (Chew-Graham et al., 2012; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Lin et al., 2012). The data was analyzed using NVivo software (Deakin, Wakefield, & Gregorius, 2012; Houghton, Casey, Shaw

& Murphy, 2013; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2015). The software aided in identifying relevant themes.

A commonly used software to analyze qualitative research data is NVivo software (Castleberry, 2012; Chen & Chan, 2013; Gibbs, 2012). I used NVivo to assist in the analysis of the data for this study. This allowed for the collection, organization, and analysis of the data (Castleberry, 2012). The first step was to upload the interview files and company documentation into the NVivo software program. Next, the software program enables the identification of key words. Concepts originate from the key words. Themes develop from groups of like concepts. I used the key themes to correlate to the conceptual framework of the multiple case study. Four main themes developed from the data collection process.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

A general process ensues whereby the background of the study is transparent to the interviewee. My employment and the selection of individuals to participate in the study was under a schedule of full disclosure. I followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix B) for each interview. The process included asking the same questions of each interviewee and allowing the same time to respond. The recording of each interview occurred via the use of a recording device. Consistent methods, as well as the openness of process operations, formed the basis for study reliability. Failure to address trust issues before the end of the study could have resulted in the researcher's inability to correct the issues (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Member checking

confirmed the correct meaning was captured from each interview participant's response (Brenner & Strand, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Morse, 2006) thus ensuring dependability. The use of member checking existed in the study.

Validity

The validation of qualitative research is through the establishment of rigor (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Morse, 2006; Sarma, 2015). The measures include consistency and trustworthiness in the study processes that contribute to both credibility and confirmability. Following processes accepted as practice, as well as the development of a feeling of trustworthiness, contributed to the view of the study as valid and reliable (Sirriyeh, Lawton, Gardner, & Armitage, 2012). For qualitative studies, it is important the researcher provides transparency in information (Fujiura, 2015; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004) for study confirmability.

Member checking is a measure to mitigate bias (Kornbluh, 2015; Peeraer & Stalmeijer, 2014; Van Schaik, O'Brien, Almeida, & Adler, 2014). The researcher confirms the interpretation of the interviewee answers with the participant (Houghton et al., 2013). The interview participant reviews and confirms the information to ensure the correct understanding. I shared the interview information with the interview participants to confirm the correct understanding of the information.

The number of interview participants will increase until the achievement of data saturation. The indicator of data saturation is when no new themes emerge (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Francis et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2013; Walker, 2012).

Confirmability of the study refers to the repeatability (Anney, 2015). Achieving data

saturation aids in the ability to repeat the study with similar results.

The confirmation of the validity of the study was by use of the actual information

as provided by the study participants. The raw data will become available by request to

me. The interviews occurred by using the same format as outlined in the Interview

Protocol in Appendix B (Brown et al., 2013; De Ceunyck et al, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson,

2012). The interview questions were identical for each interview subject although the

follow-up questions differed based on the interview participants' response. Adjustment

and verification of study information occurring throughout the study process enhanced

the validity of the data as opposed to waiting to review and correct the information at the

end of the study (Morse et al., 2002).

A challenge of validity for case studies is the perceived lack of transferability of

the information to the population (Hallberg, 2012). Transferability refers to the ability to

replicate the study or apply it in different areas (Gadoud, 2013). The ability to transfer

the study to other areas or to replicate it depends on the depth and accuracy of

descriptions provided by the researcher (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). For

the study, the focus was the group of individuals working in the logistics industry. The

information garnered from the study should be transferable to the industry in general.

The concepts used in the logistics industry are the same from sector to sector. They

include receiving, order picking, and shipping. The structure of the work should be

similar for distribution and will aid in developing consistency in information. The

interview participants should be able to provide useful information for distribution firms

in general. Detailed descriptions of the processes followed in the study should aid in transferability.

The use of detailed descriptions regarding the data collection process will aid in transferability of the study (Anney, 2015; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Vanclay et al., 2013). A rich description of the data collection methods exists in the Data Collection Technique, and Data Collection Instruments sections in this study. The Interview Protocol that I will use is in Appendix B.

Transition and Summary

The section includes the details of the basis for the study that is the soft skills training strategies for the 21st century workforce in the logistics industry. The study will consist of three interviews with individuals from the logistics industry. The individuals will possess a minimum of two years' experience in the industry.

Data collection for the qualitative case study consisted of interviews and a review of company documentation. The interview protocol was to record each interview digitally. The data was coded using NVivo software. The raw data, as well as the participant names, is in a secured, locked container for 5 years after completion of the study.

Ethical research guidelines were in use for the study. As a result, study participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Section 3 includes the results of the study including the findings and implications for future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of the qualitative multiple case study was to explore the soft skills training strategies used by logistics industry leaders. The four themes that emerged from the study are (a) the use of a combination of group and individual training, (b) the identification of training needs by individual, (c) the use of a systematic method to resolve emotional behaviors at work, and (d) the importance of effective communication.

Presentation of the Findings

I used semistructured interviews and document review to explore the research question for this qualitative multiple case study:

RQ: What soft skills training strategies do leaders in the logistics industry use? Understanding one's emotions as well as the emotions of others is a factor in communication (Kim, Khon, & Aidosova, 2016). Individuals with high emotional intelligence are better at handling work stress leading to less counterproductive work behaviors (Keskin, Akgun, Ayar, & Kayman, 2016). Positive employee customer interaction contributes to customer retention and company profitability (Prentice, 2016). The soft skills identified in the study can affect an individual's emotions. Emotional intelligence is the awareness an individual has about themselves and others while soft skills are the way that an individual acts in response to that awareness. Positive emotional experiences between employees and customers are a profitability differentiator for some firms (Prentice, 2016).

Three logistics company leaders identified in the study as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2) and Participant 3 (P3) from the counties of Burlington, Middlesex, and Somerset, New Jersey, participated in the study. The four themes that emerged from the study are (a) the use of a combination of group and individual training, (b) the identification of training needs by individual, (c) the use of a systematic method to resolve emotional behaviors at work, and (d) the importance of effective communication.

Theme 1: Combination of Group and Individual Training

Organizations recognize the need for enhanced employee skills in the highly competitive marketplace that occur through increased training opportunities (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013). The companies involved in this study use a combination of group and individual training to accomplish their strategic training goals. P3 indicated the use of a combination of one-on-one and classroom training. P3 said, "I do one-on-one and group [training] depending on the situation." P3 shared that one reason that group training is preferred is to avoid singling out an employee as it may give the appearance to the other workers that the individual is needy. "I try to do a combination of the both [one-on-one and group training]," said P3. It is very important to P3 that the employees understand how to communicate with the customers. A singular training focus may be used in addition to group training to ensure that the employee provides excellent customer service.

Of the three companies, P1's company has the most extensive training program. As stated in company documents, an expectation exists that employees will take charge

of their own career and growth. The following statement in a company document referenced talent acquisition: "The creation of a development plan starts with the employee who knows best where they are motivated to grown and learn." P1's company provides the necessary training tools. A company document outlining the leadership development program advises that the tools come from programs that focus on, "leadership development, management education and development, and personal and professional development including online learning." The talent acquisition documents from P1's company include that learning is individual, from others, and from training: "Offerings are extensive and span individual development, team development, organization development, and leadership development." The company documents contain a statement that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own development. The company management and leadership documents include that "All development is self development and will occur only if you [the individual] make[s] it happen." P1's company provided the necessary tools for the employees to learn in the work environment. Some of the training at P1's company is available online. The globally accessible training is flexible for individuals to work into their schedule.

P1 described the manager's role in setting staff training assignments. P1 said, "Each leader in the organization identifies the training curriculum for their staff. The managers assign the appropriate training. The composition of the training is 95% existing programs. Five percent is dedicated to industry specific themes." P1 explained that the reason a significant amount of the training is existing programs is to ensure "the way in which the training and contents are delivered are valid." The managers at P1's

company are considered the best individuals to evaluate the needs of the employees. The managers have an understanding of future business needs and can direct their employees to strengthen specific areas of their background. Talent acquisition documents from P1's company support individual and group training focus as evidenced in the statement, "We offer on-the-job training, plus extensive, globally accessible training and development of the individual, team, and organizational levels."

Employee coaching takes place at P2's company to ensure individuals understand their role in representing the organization when dealing with customers in person or on the phone. Karlsson and Skalen (2015) stated that some front-line employees understand the strategies for the companies where they work. Iyer and Fohlke (2015), who found an inverse relationship between an employee's role ambiguity and the level of service that they provide to their customers, examined the importance of an external customer mindset. Managers should work on reducing the employee's role ambiguity through feedback and training programs in addition to ensuring that company reward systems align with customer service goals (Iyer & Fohlke, 2015). P2 shared the most successful soft skills training strategy is continual reinforcement of positive behaviors. Impromptu meetings and individual employee meetings occur at P2's company. P2 said, "We will have impromptu meetings with them in the mornings or when they come back in the afternoon we will speak with them." A challenge that exists at P2's company is meeting scheduling due to different work schedules. "The difficulty in having those meetings is everyone is on a different schedule and it's hard to coordinate a specific time," said P2. The employees at P2's company have direct interface with customers. The workers are

expected to stay focused and get their job completed as efficiently as possible when they are at the worksite. The workers are also expected to manage any issues that occur when they are on a jobsite. The workers can be stressed at times due to the competing priorities of getting their job done efficiently in addition to dealing with onsite issues.

The competitive nature of P2's business adds pressure to the importance of retaining customers. A business relationship is generally required to gain new customers in P2's business. The relationship building process may be lengthy and includes referrals. Negative feedback may have a significant negative impact on the business.

The importance of reinforcing positive behaviors is the potential negative impact that may occur from employee word of mouth statements (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013). A few highlights from the Harris and Ogbonna (2013) study include several factors. First, employees who work for companies with requirements to follow strict customer service guidelines may feel a lack of control. Second, to feel better about themselves, these individuals may spread negative statements about the organization, competitors, or other employees. Third, a link to emotion occurs when whistle blowers decide to speak up about an impropriety. The study by Harris and Ogbonna included 54 interviews from employees in the service industry.

In a study by Slear, Reames, Slear, Maggard, & Connelly (2016), it was determined that programmers can work with students to develop the same collaboration and group experience online as is experienced in a classroom setting. The importance of working in a group where an individual confronts multiple opinions is that a group environment is a catalyst for leadership growth (Slear et al., 2016). Some organizations

agree that people are central to the success of high performance teams and that team learning drives that success (Harrington & Carawan, 2016). Some K-12 schools have added social and emotional learning (SEL) programs to address emotional intelligence and soft skills deficits (Bratsis, 2016). In a study of 213 SEL programs involving 270,034 K-12 students, individual SEL program participants showed gains in academic achievement versus students who did not participate (Bratsis, 2016). In contrast, emotional intelligence training did not have a noteworthy effect on participants in a study from England although they reported having a positive experience (Realistic, 2016). The study focused on social workers who were suffering from high stress and burnout due to the demands placed on them at work (Realistic, 2016). The participants enjoyed the emotional intelligence training; however, without follow-up, they did not have reinforcement of the training message.

Altindag and Kosedagi (2015) stated that managers who have a low emotional intelligence level are not equipped to effect organizational culture. In organizations such as the company where P3 works where some managers "lead by example" additional focus may need to be on soft skills training for both managers and front line workers. Altindag and Kosedagi, posited that organizations should train individuals on emotional intelligence because emotional intelligence may be the driver for some soft skills. This idea was in contrast to training soft skills in order to gain emotional intelligence. Hendon, Powell, and Wimmer (2017) identified a correlation between positive emotional intelligence and soft skills. As stated in the Hendon et al., (2016) study, a review of the skills a person possesses and those that are lacking aids in determining the areas to train.

Sung and Choi (2014) found that organizational innovation continues for several years after training is completed. Organizations that once viewed employees as individual contributors may find value in developing group and individual training to enhance emotional intelligence competencies (Boyatzis, Rochford, & Cavanagh, 2016). Focus has been on developing soft skills, however, the work of Altindag and Kosedagi provided reasoning for focus on enhancing emotional intelligence that in turn may drive soft skills development.

Theme 2: Identify Training Needs by Individual

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

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

P1 company documents about career development stress the importance of a development plan for each individual. The expectation exists that employees are

accountable for their training and development. A company document about career growth states, "We expect employees to bring the drive and vision for their own career."

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

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

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

P2 shared the importance of coaching each individual on how they interact with customers. P2 said, "The best strategy would be continuing to reinforce what they should be doing. The important skills are their ability to deal with customers." A key focus for P2's company is customer retention due to the competitive nature of the industry. P2 shared that it is important for the employees to understand how difficult it is to gain new business. P2 stated, "So, once we get a new account, we go to the nth degree to satisfy the customer and retain the account." The P2 company website states that exceptional service is a differentiator. The customer testimonials confirm that the company provides exceptional service including that employees are responsive, pleasant, and accommodating. "Everyone is very helpful and a pleasure to interact with. Thanks for your excellent customer service," writes a customer. Another customer writes, "Thanks again for the great customer service!" A recommended training approach is that the trainer shares the importance of soft skills with the trainee so that the trainee has a greater understanding of the impact (Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly & Troy, 2016). P2 is following the approach by ensuring that the employees understand the value of their customers.

A job description at P3's company requires the employee to "coach and train team members to improve performance." There is a focus at P3's company on staff development. The focus is evidenced while reading company job descriptions. A job description requirement is for the employee to have "… interpersonal skills; ability to foster teamwork and motivate/coach others." A notation on another job description is the employee "… is responsible for the training and/or coordination of training for team

members." "Train new associates …" is on another job description. P3 stated, "[I] do a lot of hands-on training in the event individuals are struggling." The training is associated with an area of work where the individual is struggling to be successful. As companies report that their employees are lacking in soft skills (Hurrell, 2016) it is important that they develop a training plan to address the gaps. Individual soft skills training may come with challenges. Due to the lack of an ability to demonstrate the performance of a task a specific way, individuals may be resistant to change soft skills thinking they are already proficient (Laker & Powell, 2011). Firms may be reluctant to provide individual training that is not firm specific due to the portability and/or transferability of the skills to competing firms (Waddoups, 2016). The companies where P1, P2, and P3 work are all providing training for their employees. The most extensive training is provided by P1's company.

The definition of emotional intelligence is awareness of one's emotions and the emotions of others (Altindag & Kosedagi, 2015). Emotional intelligence aids an individual in communication that is a soft skill (Hendon et al., 2017). Khattack, Rehman, and Rehman (2014) shared the importance of interpersonal and communication skills for organizational success in a service industry. Training should be determined individually given that the teaching approach may need adjustment based on varying individual needs (Schutte et al., 2013). Personality and generational differences may contribute to skills deficits (Aydogmus, 2016).

Theme 3: Systematic Method to Resolve Emotional Behavior

Emotions are part of the communication process for individuals (Hendon et al., 2017). Understanding an individual's emotions is an aid in proper communication response. Ahmadian, Azarshahi, and Paulhus (2017) found that the style of delivery such as the pitch could influence the success of one's communication. Without emotional intelligence and communication, negative workplace behaviors may occur (Hendon et al., 2017). P1, P2, and P3 each have strategies to address emotional behaviors at their respective work sites that focus on dealing with the behavior. P2 stated, "The strategy for dealing with emotional behaviors depends on the situation. Although people get upset and have bad days, their feeling should not affect their ability to deal with the customer. The relationship with the customer companies is important."

 Prentice (2016) found that the service that employees provide to customers affects the firm's ability to retain customers. Prentice further stated that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle work stress and emotionally charged issues in the workplace, which results in a higher perception of quality by the customer. P2 recognizes the importance of customer retention. The company where P2 works employs less than 100 workers. Losing a customer due to inappropriate behavior of an employee has the potential to negatively impact sales.

Emotionally intelligent individuals are a factor in reducing conflict in cross-functional sourcing teams (Kaufmann & Wagner, 2017). When positive behaviors do not occur, some organizations implement work rules to address the issues. P1 shared specific details about the strategy to deal with emotional behaviors:

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

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

through the phone." P2 and P3 shared the importance of customer service to their business.

P3 stated the use of a private setting to address challenging workplace behaviors. "I would never engage in confrontation in a public setting," P3 shared. An individual who is not meeting expectations, or who does not follow work rules or SOPs may exhibit challenging workplace behaviors at P3's company.

Individuals who are able to regulate their emotion and emotional behavior have better interpersonal relationships at work, less conflict, and are more engaged (Schutte, & Loi, 2014). Garcia-Sancho, Salguero, and Fernandez-Berrocal (2014) posited that an inverse relationship exists between emotional abilities and aggressive behaviors. Garcia-Sancho et al. (2014) further confirmed that individuals who have low emotional intelligence focus on relieving their individual stress. The focus of removing individual stress interferes with their focus on solving the actual problem. The individual wants to get out of their stress situation without figuring out what caused it. Lack of issue resolution may lead to repeat of the problem (Garcia-Sancho et al., 2014).

Hurrell (2016) studied the concept of employee skills withdrawal. The study focused on employees who are unhappy at work and as a result, withdraw their skills. The employee skill withdrawal behavior may produce what is reported as a skills gap when it is a behavioral concern. Business should be concerned with emotional intelligence as it correlates to organizational outcomes (Sony & Mekoth, 2016) including employee safety behaviors (Lu & Kuo, 2016). Similarly, conflict resolution has the potential to affect organizational effectiveness (Gunkel, Schlaegel, & Vas Taras, 2016).

Therefore, organizations should be concerned with employee emotional intelligence, and soft skills as they have a direct impact on various factors affecting productivity and organizational performance. An individual's use of emotional intelligence mitigates counterproductive work behavior that may affect worker productivity (Keskin et al., 2016).

The diverse set of skills identified in the current study is an indicator of the importance of soft skills in the business environment. Jones, Baldi, Phillips, and Waikar (2016) found that soft skills ranked among the top skills that recruiters were looking for in candidates. The top skill out of 21 listed was having a positive attitude. Additional soft skills areas referenced were being a good communicator, strong interpersonal skills, being a team player, and leadership ability. P1, P2, and P3 identified numerous soft skills during the interview response that included having a good attitude, being an effective communicator, strong interpersonal skills, teamwork, and leadership. P1 stated the importance of "effective communication," "leading," and "team building." The expectation of the workers at P2's company is to display a positive attitude when interacting with customers.

> We tell them how important it is for them to be courteous; how important it is for them to put on a happy face irrespective of what happened in the truck or at the last stop. They need to be happy. They need to be cordial. They need to be accommodating. They need to do all of the things that makes them a good representative for the company.

"Being able to communicate to the customer," is important to P3's company. Employees need to be "able to understand and relate to the customer," said P3. Overlap exists in some of the soft skills identified in the study with the Jones et al. (2016) study. The significance of the finding is that the specific soft skills identified will depend on the respondent group. It is important to highlight the expectation of proficiency of multiple soft skills at the interview participant companies.

Corporations have a tendency to blame individuals for soft skills gaps and these employees leave the company (Hurrell, 2016). The monetary costs of employee attrition are significant (Juniper, 2012) including costs to quality. Gwynne (2016) stated that the focus of companies on hiring individuals who are strong in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) is resulting in a workforce that is less emotionally intelligent. Gwynne stated that companies who are interested in diversifying their workforce would have a need to hire liberal arts workers because liberal arts comprise the largest amount of diverse individuals. Gwynne added that the STEM group is lacking in soft skills such as empathy. If corporations blame individuals for soft skills gaps (Hurrell, 2016), and a significant focus of organizations is on hiring STEM candidates (Gwynne, 2016), organizations may be faced with soft skills challenges that may have an effect on worker job satisfaction and productivity. Therefore, organizational focus should be on accepting responsibility for worker skills gaps and identifying ways to diminish the skills gaps through training.

P2 and P3 cited continued reinforcement of positive behaviors as a key to successful soft skills training. P2 said, "We explain to them that they have to be cordial

and they have to be accommodating to our customers. Customer service is huge at the end of the day." P3 shared, "I don't like to address one thing and then go for a month and not worry about it. I like to do continuous reinforcement and giving them an evaluation of how I think they're doing." Soft skills can be learned (Gibert, Tozer, & Westoby, 2016). Trainers must be cognizant of the fact that individuals do not have the same learning style (Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly, & Troy, 2016). Therefore, it is important that organizations use the method such as positive behavior reinforcement that works best for their workforce. Hurrell (2016) agrees that the soft skills training program should reflect the needs of the organization. Organizational concerns exist about the ability to measure the effectiveness of soft skills training programs (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016).

Theme 4: Effective Communication

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

competition has enhanced the importance of employee communication (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016).

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

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

Consideration of emotional intelligence in teams and among team leaders is important, as there are job satisfaction consequences (Liu & Liu, 2013). In describing a successful work environment, P1 shared that "Leaders should create an environment with an aura of honesty, and integrity, with openness to collaboration and the discovery of sharing ideas." P1's statement is in contrast to the idea presented by Jones et al. (2016) that the new technological ways of communicating have negatively affected our ability to communicate with each other. Gibert et al. (2016) found that 80% of leaders correlate

positive collaboration with productivity increases. Job descriptions from the organization where P1 works cite a requirement for individuals in logistics jobs to be proficient in communication. Prospective employees should display teamwork skills, be good listeners, and focus on customer satisfaction. A job description document from P1's company reads, "Excellent oral and written communication skills in English, with the ability to communicate to a wide variety of audiences."

P3 stated, "The individual needs to be able to evaluate the information and explain it to the customer. Associates need to be able to communicate effectively to customers. They need to understand the customer needs and expectations." The requirement that employees have excellent verbal communication skills is on some job descriptions for the P3 organization. The "ability to communicate clearly with customers and fellow associates" is shown on a job description for P3's company. Employees should be able to "confer with customers or supervising personnel in order to address questions, problems, complaints, and requests for service."

The success in face-to-face communication training highlighted in a soft skills training program study (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016) accentuates the importance of effective customer communication. It is important that the employees have the soft skills to communicate with the customers. It is equally important that the people managers have the emotional intelligence and soft skills to be able to work with, and train the associates that report to them. Kim, Khon, and Aidosova (2016) stated that individuals who are emotionally intelligent recognize and use communication channels that are appropriate for a given situation.

Hendon et al. (2017) stated that individuals with high emotional intelligence possess effective communication skills. Emotional intelligence skills aid in the ability to mitigate conflict in group settings (Kaufmann & Wagner, 2017). The ability to communicate effectively may improve the ability to collaborate, which is a factor in increased job satisfaction (Alegre, Mas-Machuca, & Mirabent, 2016).

Applications to Professional Practice

Soft skills and emotional behavior affect business outcomes (Gunkel et al., 2016; Hurrell, 2016; Sony & Mekoth, 2016). The current state of business is very competitive (Prentice, 2016). The mix of workers has changed. The workforce consists of employees who have gender, age, and generational differences (Seago, 2016). Company survival is dependent on workers in the global marketplace. Organizational focus must be on hiring and retaining workers who have the ability to create a harmonious work environment with the ultimate goal of productivity increases (Altindag & Kosedagi, 2015).

A historical practice in the logistics industry has been to promote individuals who have institutional knowledge. Learning the technical aspects of the job would position the employee for promotional opportunities. Technical skills are no longer enough. Individuals should also possess soft skills.

Companies should set up training programs to develop soft skills in the employees who are soft skill deficient. Training should be determined individually. It should consist of a combination of group and individual training. A portion of the training should focus on effective communication. A documented plan for dealing with emotional behaviors at work should exist. Hiring individuals who possess soft skills, and

developing soft skills in those who are soft skill deficient is a critical concern for business leaders.

Implications for Social Change

In the United States, the land of opportunity, there are groups of individuals who are not succeeding. A review of the unemployment statistics does not provide a clear picture of some groups of affected workers (Rothstein, 2016). The unemployment rate for individuals who live in poverty is significantly higher than the overall reported figure (Wozniak, 2011). Unemployment statistics as of February 2017 are that the unemployment rate of Hispanic or Latinos is 1.5 points greater than the unemployment rate for whites and 4 points greater for Black or African Americans which is nearly twice the rate for whites (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). In the group of unemployed are 522,000 discouraged workers who have lost their hope in attaining gainful employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017).

Affected by this group, are children. In order for them to have the opportunity for a fulfilling life and bright future, the home environment of those whose families are living in poverty, needs improvement (Schubert & Marks, 2016). Parental stress due to factors such as employment has a direct effect on their children (Schubart & Marks, 2016). Therefore, programs that provide the tools to assist the parents in gaining and retaining employment is a focus. Children living in poverty are linked to poor psychological outcomes, poor health, low high school completion rates, increased stress due to lack of basic needs being met, and impaired future success (Chaudry & Wilmer,

2016). Addressing the employability needs of the parent is expected to result in a positive outcome for their children.

Soft skills can be trained (Gilbert, tozer, & Westoby, 2016). Saini (2016) refers to these skills as life skills that are important to reduce stress. The employment needs of unemployed individuals and those living in poverty are a focus to create a stable life. The training program would service individuals who are lacking in soft skills. The program design would include group and individual training, as well as address effective communication, and emotional behaviors. The training program would aid workers who both have a skills deficit and are unemployed, or who are employed but in the process of losing their job due to behavioral or performance issues. The ability for unemployed individuals to gain and retain a job would benefit their self-confidence and may reduce household stress. The potential exists to favorably impact social welfare programs by providing the soft skills training needed to aid in the gain and retention of jobs.

Recommendations for Action

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

Soft skills training programs should include group and individual training, a focus on individual needs, contain a component to address emotional behaviors at work, and include training on effective communication. Employers should determine the level of training offered to employees. If a concern exists that the training is portable to other organizations leaders may consider having employees sign a waiver that requires repayment of the training program costs in the event that the employee resigns his or her position prior to a specified time period (Waddoup, 2016).

I plan to disseminate the results of the study with the study participants. A summary of the study results is part of the distribution plan. I will prepare the study for submission to business journals. It is my intent to focus on setting up soft skills training programs utilizing the information that I have obtained from this research study.

Recommendations for Further Research

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

The subject of training soft skills versus training emotional intelligence is a subject for exploration. The focus for this study was successful soft skills training

strategies. Altindag and Kosedagi (2015) indicated the desired soft skill outcomes may be achieved by training emotional intelligence. Further research is suggested to determine whether it is beneficial to train soft skills directly or whether emotional intelligence training should occur to achieve the desired soft skills result.

Reflections

My career in distribution influenced my interest in studying soft skills in the logistics industry. I reached out to logistics organizations in New Jersey to invite participation into the study. For reasons such as confidentiality concerns, I did not gain participants as expected. The next step was to utilize networking contacts to invite study participation, which yielded success.

Through work experience, I am personally aware of some of the employee issues that employers face. My focus was on mitigating any personal bias. During the interview process, I allowed the interview participant to speak without interrupting their responses. I used member checking to ensure that I captured the essence of their reply.

I expected from the study that there would be a larger duplication of soft skills named by the study participants. I was surprised that all three participants shared the same one theme: effective communication. My surprise was that the participants collectively identified only one main soft skill from the many mentioned.

Conclusion

Workers lack soft skills (Anthony & Garner, 2016). The soft skills deficit includes communication, problem solving, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills (Robles, 2012; Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012; Selvadurai, Choi, & Maros, 2012).

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

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What strategies exist for training soft skills in your organization?

2. What strategy do you consider most important and why?

3. What is your most successful soft skills training strategy?

4. What strategies do you use to overcome challenging workplace behaviors?

5. What soft skills do you consider the most important?

6. What are your strategies for dealing with emotional behaviors?

7. What types of workers have you observed with soft skills challenges?

8. What makes your soft skills training program successful?

9. How is the success of your soft skills training program measured?

10. What would you like to add that was not covered in the interview questions?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Thank the interview participant for volunteering to participate in the study.

2. Request that the interview participant sign the Consent form.

3. Explain to the interview participant that participation in the study is voluntary and can be retracted at any time by contacting me via email.

4. Explain to the interview participant that their responses will be held in anonymity.

5. Advise the participant that the interview will be audio recorded and that I will take notes.

6. Start the interview questions.

7. Ask follow-up questions as needed.

8. Thank the interview participant for their time and participation.

9. Explain to the interview participant that I will be contacting them via email within 48 hours as part of the member checking process. They should reply to my email with any changes within 72 hours.