

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL DANCE SKILLS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
EMPLOYEE SOFT SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Employee soft skills are necessary in nearly every occupation for both employee and organizational success. There is a considerable body of knowledge related to the development of employee soft skills, and soft skills training is now seen in some educational curricula and organizational training programs. Yet, employers continue to report that employees and candidates are either lacking in or have underdeveloped soft skills, hampering both worker and organizational success. Soft skills cross domains and are not confined to use in the workplace; hence, they can also be developed in non-work domains. In this qualitative study, accomplished social dancers described their perception of their employee soft skill development and any perceived impact their social dance skills had on that. Data was examined via narrative and content analysis for the impact, if any, of social dance skills on the development of employee soft skills, and a positive impact was found. These findings suggest that social dance is an effective option for employee soft skill training. The findings of this study also provide further impetus for researchers and practitioners to consider incorporating more holistic, non-work domain activities in the development of employee soft skills.

Key words: social dance, soft skills, employee soft skills, transfer of skills

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my daughters, Hannah Margaret Patridge and Elianna Camille Patridge, whom I adore and respect tremendously. They have been the joy of my life, and they inspire me to be the best woman, mother, and psychologist I can be. As their eyes are on me, I endeavor to keep my eyes on God who is the designer and inspiration of life, love, meaningful work, and the joy of dance.

This study is also dedicated to my social dance community that I affectionately call the “Dance Junkies.” Thank you for a thousand dances, may we share a million more!

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It is a good thing to make people think;
it is a far better thing to make them get up and dance.

(author unknown)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Employee soft skills (ESS) are considered to be foundational to organizational thriving and success; however, employers report a problematic lack in the ESS of employees and applicants (Iorio et al., 2022). Some of the top ESS employers have identified as important for organizational functioning are adaptability, empathy, leadership, creativity, teamwork, communication, and decisiveness (Royo, 2019). These skills are differentiated from hard skills which have to do with employee tasks and vary widely by profession. ESS, conversely, are needed in almost every profession, and are employed in both work and outside-of-work roles and may be developed in either domain (Betti et al., 2022).

Referring again to Royo's 2019 study, which reported on the ESS that are most valued by employers, an overlap can be seen between the expression of those skills in the workplace and on the dance floor. Adaptability provides a good example of this; social dancers must adapt ongoingly on both macro and micro levels to societal changes in dance, venues, music sources, their current dance partner, other dancers in motion on the floor, and the conditions of the floor and environment. Real-time adaptability is necessary to navigate non-verbal communication and adjustments to one's dance partner, the music, and the conditions around them in every dance executed, often requiring split-second adjustments to accommodate their partner's responses and the need to navigate a crowded dance floor. Without adaptability, a dancer will not experience much success and may even put themselves or their dance partner at risk of injury.

This study examined the overlap and impact of social dance (SD) skills on the

development of ESS. In this study, the history of the study of ESS was reviewed, followed by an overview of which ESS are thought to be most valued and the current means of intentionally cultivating those skills. Known benefits of dance were reviewed, as well as the Transfer of Life Skills model, which provided the theoretical foundation for the feasibility of the transfer of SD skills to ESS (Pierce et al., 2017). Finally, the biblical foundations for this study were identified as the platform on which the importance of both ESS and SD rests.

Background

History of the Study of Employee Soft Skills

The construct ESS began to be defined in the early 1970s in United States' military literature, having emerged from research beginning in the 1950s about the skills needed to be effective in management (Parlami & Monnot, 2019). ESS are both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Botke et al., 2018). Some of these interpersonal skills, such as communication and the ability to work well with a team, are often thought of as 'people skills.' Other ESS may appear to be associated with character traits; such as in the case of the soft skill of adaptability bearing resemblance with the trait of openness as described in the Big Five Personality Inventory literature (Orkibi, 2021). While there may be a correlation between certain soft skills and traits, and there is still some debate about how to define ESS, many researchers and psychologists have identified them as skills because they can be learned (Touloumakos, 2020).

It is commonly acknowledged in current industrial-organizational research that ESS contribute significantly to organizational outcomes and well-being (Ibrahim et al., 2017). El-tabal (2020) found that ESS are strongly tied to organizational creativity. Similarly,

Orkibi's 2021 study revealed that ESS significantly factor into creative adaptability within organizations. In addition to creativity, ESS have been shown to impact teamwork, interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning, motivation, transference of skills, communication, motivation, leadership, performance, and ongoing organizational outcomes inter alia (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Botke et al., 2018; Cheng-Wen & Kusumah, 2019; Mareque et al., 2019).

ESS touch almost every aspect of organizational functioning. They are so critical to employee and organizational success that some researchers are calling for an end to the term 'soft skills' because it has a somewhat 'less than' connotation in the realm of employment skills (Iorio et al., 2022). Parlamis and Monnot (2019) assert that ESS are so critical to employee and organizational functioning that they should be called core skills, rather than soft skills. Currently, much of the focus for the deliberate development of ESS is on educational curricula and workplace trainings (Baussell et al., 2020; Betti et al., 2022).

Social Dance Impact and Working Definition

SD in various forms has been a part of human life and expression as both sacred and social practices in every culture across time (Youngerman, 1974). There are a myriad of well-being-related outcomes associated with social dance (SD) such as increased neuroplasticity, increased working memory, alleviation of depressive symptoms, increased attunement, improved sensorimotor function, and improved cardiovascular health (Aguinaga et al., 2022; Alfredsson Olsson & Heikkinen, 2019; Akandere & Demir, 2011; Cuevas, 2020; Giacosa et al., 2016).

Additionally, dance has been shown to improve areas of functioning for individuals

struggling with neurological conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Alzheimer's disease (Kontos & Grigorovitch, 2018, Teixeira-Machado et al., 2019).

Domains of life are rarely entirely discreet, and activities that improve individual well-being often have the potential to improve employee well-being as well. For the purposes of this study, social dance is defined as partnered dance styles common in the United States that require a leader and a follower who form a frame and must use touch to lead and respond to one another. Several examples of this type of social dance are swing dance, ballroom dance, and Latin dance.

The Overlap of Social Dance and Employee Soft Skills

The ESS of empathy, leadership, creativity, teamwork, communication, and decisiveness are also seen in most dances. It is possible for a social dancer to be lacking in one or more skills just as it is in the workplace with ESS. If a social dancer were to lack either the ESS or technical dance skills needed to communicate with their dance partner, it could put them, their partner, and others on the dance floor at risk.

Adaptability and communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, are critical for success in both social dance and within organizations. Well-developed SD skills translate into successful, positive dance experiences. Well-developed ESS help promote both employee and organizational success, suggesting a possible cross-domain relationship.

Biblical Foundation

In many ways, ESS, because they are both interpersonal and intrapersonal, are biblically rooted in love. The biblical injunction to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself is the foundation of the biblical call for ESS (Luke 27:10, *New American Standard Bible*). ESS such as teamwork, leadership, followership, and empathy

are also based on love. They are nested within the context of knowing that all members of the body of Christ, and indeed all individuals, are valued and none is to be elevated above another, no matter their position in the body (Krispin, 2020, I Corinthians 12:12-27, *New American Standard Bible*).

Dance, too, has biblical foundations. In scripture, we see that dance is an expression of joy or worship, particularly in community settings (Schuff, 2019; Wright, 2002; Zaluchu, 2021). Psalm 149:3 (*New American Standard Bible*) urges God's people to praise him with dance. Dance is described in scripture as a joyful response to God's blessings (Jeremiah 31:4, Psalm 30:11, *New American Standard Bible*). Conversely, scripture refers to the cessation of dancing when there is mourning (Lamentations 5:15, Psalm, 20:12, *New American Standard Bible*). God has built into humans the ability to respond with our entire beings to the sorrows and joys of life, and dance is one way in which we can express ourselves and communicate with others (Jeremiah 31:12, *New American Standard Bible*).

Problem Statement

ESS impact multiple elements of organizational functioning and culture and are considered to be critical for organizational success (Ibrahim et al., 2017; Royo, 2019). These impacts of ESS are far-reaching. They have been shown to influence creativity, teamwork, interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning within organizations, motivation, transference of skills, communication, motivation, leadership, performance, and ongoing organizational outcomes inter alia (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Botke et al., 2018; Cheng-Wen & Kusumah, 2019; Mareque et al., 2019). Soft skills are also vital for employees and job seekers. Development and possession of soft skills enable employees to

participate more successfully in the workforce, increasing their upward mobility and ability to engage in meaningful work (Meeks, 2017). Increased success in the workplace often translates into increased quality of life for employees and their families.

Since the study of ESS began in the 1950s and became more formalized in the 1970s, researchers have examined the nature of soft skills and their impact on organizations and workers (Parlami & Monnot, 2019). There have been continued efforts to come to a consensus on the definition of ESS and to empirically determine which are most important for organizational and employee well-being (Royo, 2019; Touloumakos, 2020). Due to deficits in necessary ESS, there have been a myriad of efforts to incorporate soft skills training into the workplace and education setting curricula (Bausse et al., 2020; Betti et al., 2022).

Adult learning models indicate that individuals learn best when they are voluntarily engaged and when learning ties into their previous knowledge (Palis & Quiros, 2014). Additionally, valence and motivation to learn are known to be important elements of both formal and informal adult learning (Yamashita et al., 2022). Despite the attention that has been given to the study of ESS, and means of improving them in working adults, employers continue to consistently report that ESS are lacking or underdeveloped in their employees and in prospective employees (Ibrahim et al., 2017; Iorio et al., 2022). More actionable information and training options for developing soft skills, especially ones that garner worker or employee interest, are a critical need for employees and organizations.

ESS can be developed in both work and non-work domains. However, other than in educational settings, little attention has been given to the development of ESS in non-work domains such as via SD. There is a body of information indicating the positive

impact of dance on cognitive and physical well-being (Aguinaga et al., 2022; Alfredsson Olsson & Heikkinen, 2019; Akandere & Demir, 2011; Cuevas, 2020; Giacosa et al., 2016). Adult social dancers perceive themselves to have improved social, physical, and cognitive skills, and the more advanced the dancer, the greater this reported perception (Lakes et al., 2016). There are plausible means for ESS developed in social dance to translate well to ones necessary for employee and organizational success This relationship had not yet been empirically explored, and it merited research as an option for working adults to gain, or hone, valuable ESS.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative, narrative study was to examine the impact of social dance skills on the development of employee soft skills in working adults.

Research Question

RQ 1: How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills to their employee soft skills?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Assumptions

It was assumed that the working-age adults in the sample would possess some ESS, which may be at varying stages of development. It was also assumed that upon receiving some information about the nature and definition of soft skills, the participants would be able to conceptualize and describe what they have noticed regarding their own ESSs. While it was assumed that the participants would voice their understanding of their own ESS, it was also assumed that they may not perceive themselves entirely accurately, or may be influenced by acquiescence or their perception of socially desirable responses

(Barker et al., 2015). It was anticipated that the participants, being in various vocations, may have conceptualized and described ESS somewhat differently. Further, it was assumed going into this study that soft skills are learned and utilized in both work and non-work domains and that there are extant mechanisms in both realms that may contribute to their development.

Challenges and Limitations

There were several potential challenges and limitations to this study. There had been no prior studies on the relationship between social dance skills and employee soft skills. Therefore, there was no parallel, extant data against which the findings of this study could be compared. Additionally, there were no experts within this specific content umbrella that could be looked to as pioneers in the exploration of the overlap of the non-work domain of social dance and work-domain soft skills. Because this was a seminal study, it may have been more challenging to determine the exact criteria to examine. Variables such as which social dance skills may, or may not, influence particular employee soft skills, or how skilled must a dancer be to achieve an impact on their ESS were not known.

Social dancers are often passionate about dance and some were eager to participate in the study. Recruitment was impacted, both positively and negatively, by the reality that the researcher participates in the SD community in the same geographic area where the sample was recruited. Additionally, data collection may have been complicated due to the social dancers having come from a wide array of occupations which may not share the same views of employee soft skills, nor share the vernacular with which they discuss them.

Potential limitations of the study began with the lack of prior studies against which this one could be compared. Other limitations were the small sample size, the geographically limited area from which the sample was drawn, and the potential impact of differing views of soft skills across the varied professions of the participants. Additionally, this study was not able to fully determine the direction of impact. It is possible that the impact, or transfer of skills only applies from SDS to ESS. However, impact may also flow in the opposite direction from ESS to SDS, and/or might be a reinforcing loop between the two. Any of these potential limitations, combination, or all of them may impact the utility and transferability of the findings. Given the convenience sampling method that was utilized, and the somewhat limited diversity of the sample, some findings may not be applicable across diverse groups.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The theoretical foundations for this study were the concept of transfer of learning, i.e. using previously acquired skills or knowledge in a new situation, and the Life Skills Transfer Model (Newman et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2017). Pierce et al. indicated that positive life skills have been observed as outcomes for youth who participate in sports training. They posit that these positive life skills, such as emotional control, work ethic, goal setting, and self-esteem cannot truly be considered to be life skills, rather than sports skills, until they are transferred into other domains of life. Noting a paucity of research about how this transfer happens, the authors conducted a critical review of the literature on learning transfer models and sports psychology to see if they could provide a definition and model of Life Skills Transfer. Pierce et al. concluded that Life Skills Transfer is an ongoing, contextualized process that takes place for the individual on a

continuum from unconscious to conscious mechanisms, which forms the basis of their Life Skills Transfer Model.

Biblical Foundation

One of the definitions of integrity is to be whole, complete, or undivided. Another definition has to do with holding firmly to a code of moral values (integrity in Merriam-Webster.com). Both definitions connote being consistent in both being and action. The Bible refers to integrity multiple times, with the book of Proverbs being largely dedicated to the cultivation and preservation of integrity along with wisdom. “As a man thinks, so is he” is a concise statement about integrity (Proverbs 23:7, *New American Standard Bible*).

Integrity, both in the secular realm and as depicted in scripture, simply means that a person is who they are in all domains of their lives. There is no complete separation of domains; human beings are the same person in the workplace as they are in the non-work domains of their lives. Hence, what impacts a person in one domain impacts them in all others. While this scriptural view is a much broader model than Pierce et al.’s (2017) model, the Life Skills Transfer Model falls within this broader truth. The transfer of skills from one life domain to another, and hence the social domain to the work domain, is encompassed within biblical writing about, and invitations to, integrity.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Active Learning – a type of learning that requires more active engagement of the learner than the traditional classroom lecture, reading, & notes method. Examples of

techniques that may be used in active learning are debates, presentations, and activities that promote teamwork (Betti et al., 2022).

Domain – “a sphere of knowledge, influence, or activity” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.) Examples; work domain, and non-work domain.

Employee Soft Skills (ESS) – personal and interpersonal skills such as attitudes and socio-emotional functioning that impact both employee and organizational success (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018).

Integrity - to be whole, complete, or undivided, also holding firmly to a code of moral values (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.)

Skills – “a learned power of doing something competently: a developed aptitude or ability” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.)

Social Dance (SD) – partnered dances that require a lead dancer and a follow dancer who must form a frame and rely, in part, on physical touch to execute the dance. Examples include ballroom dance, swing dance, and blues dance (Varga, 1972)

Life Skills Transfer – utilizing skills learned in one domain of life in another domain of life (Pierce et al., 2017)

Well-being – Various disciplines such as medicine and psychology may have additional criteria, but at the most basic level, well-being is “the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, n.d.)

Significance of the Study

This was the first study examining the impact, if any, of SD skills on the development of ESS. A positive effect was discovered, which has the potential to impact our understanding of, and approach to, the development of ESS. People bring themselves to

the workplace. Finding ways to fill the gap in ESS development that looks to life domains other than work validated SD as an avenue for the development of ESS, and provides a basis to broaden our thinking in the Industrial Organizational Psychology field about how ESS can be developed and fine-tuned in non-work domains.

Additionally, this study serves as an impetus and foundation for future research to build and expand upon the exploration of the impact of SD skills on ESS. It also serves as a reason to explore the impact of other non-work domain social activities on the same. One implication for practice is the value of incorporating social dance/soft skills training in the workplace. Another implication is that there is value in educating employees about the relationship of SD skills with ESS and encouraging social dance as a part of work-life balance that also enhances workplace skills.

Summary

There is an ongoing need for increased ESS which current educational and workplace training efforts have not adequately addressed (Iorio et al., 2022). ESS are utilized in both work and non-work domains and can be developed in both; hence, it is a natural step to look beyond the current body of knowledge and practice to non-work domains to investigate additional means of developing ESS. SD has been shown to have a positive impact on human functioning, and there are plausible mechanisms, such as those detailed in the Life Skills Transfer Model (Pierce et al., 2017), by which SD skills may translate into the development of ESS. An increase in the development of ESS increases the wellbeing of individuals and organizations. This study aimed to explore SD as a potential option for developing ESS that could be of value to researchers, practitioners, organizations, and employees.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review covers the relevant history of the development of the concept of ESS, the historic study of ESS, and current understanding of their importance for employee and organizational success. It also includes the benefits imparted by social dance. Information about adult learning models is presented, given that this study focuses on working adults. The Transfer of Life Skills Model is covered as the theoretical background for the study and plausible mechanism of transfer of skills learned in SD being related to the development of ESS.

No previous study has been done exploring a potential link between SD and the development of ESS, therefore this literature review addresses pertinent supporting related studies. These include, inter alia, the neurocognitive, physical, social, and creativity-promoting benefits of dance and the benefits of sports training on the development of life skills. Finally, a biblical foundation for the study of SD and ESS is included. Together, these topics set the stage for the study of the impact of SD skills on ESS.

Description of Search Strategy

The Jerry Falwell Library as well as Google searches were utilized as the entry points for the discovery of scholarly research pertinent to this study. Primary search terms included the following: history of soft skills, employee soft skills, definition of soft skills, importance of employee soft skills, acquisition of employee soft skills, gap in employee soft skills, teaching soft skills, most valuable soft skills, benefits of dance, neurocognitive + dance, health + dance, social impact of dance, history of social dance,

adult learning models, transfer of skills models, and transfer of life skills. Searches for dance + soft skills returned no usable results. Databases from which journal articles were retrieved include Elsevier, PlosOne, Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest, and SpringerLink. Search parameters were set for studies published in peer-reviewed journals within the past five years.

Search terms for the biblical foundations for this study included: dance + Bible, theology of dance, soft skills + scripture, consistency + character + Bible, and interpersonal skills + Bible. Word studies, biblical stories, and published studies were used to examine the biblical foundations for dance, congruence across domains, and skills related to ESS. All studies reviewed meet the peer-reviewed criteria, and the majority of the published findings in this review were published within the preceding five years.

Review of Literature

Historical Study of Soft Skills

At first look, a review of the literature appears to indicate that the construct of ESS is a relatively new one, emerging in the mid-twentieth century and becoming more solidified in the 1970s (Iorio et al., 2020; Touloumakos, 2020). However, there are writings and studies that recorded the recognition of and importance of ESS which long predate their direct identification and study. For example, historical investigation in the field of medicine has revealed that the need for relationship-based and personal skills has been discussed as important features in the practice of medicine since the mid-nineteenth century (Iorio et al., 2022).

The Carnegie Foundation published the results of a study in 1918 which revealed the importance of ESS decades before the recognized launch of their study. Charles Ribborg

Mann, in conjunction with the Carnegie Foundation, conducted polls amongst members of large engineering societies in the US about skills necessary for success in the field of engineering (nationalsoftskills.org) to help determine what should be included in engineering educational curricula. More than 7,000 engineers responded to a survey asking them to rank qualities in order of importance for success in the field. The qualities to be ranked were judgment, character, understanding of men, efficiency, and technique. Responses decisively indicated that character ranked first, while technique was ranked last. Overall, the qualities that would now be called ESS were reported to be responsible for 85% of the success of engineers, with the remaining 15% were attributed to technical skills (nationalsoftskills.org).

Following closely on the heels of Mann's study, Elton Mayo, an associate professor at the Harvard School of Business Administration, became involved in what is known as the Hawthorne Experiments that took place at a Western Electric's plant in Chicago between 1924 and 1932 (Weatherburn, 2020). The purpose of the experiments was to examine variables that best increased employee motivation and output. While these experiments were not directly tied to ESS, which had still not yet been distinctively identified, they clearly revealed that the human relational element was important for motivation in the workplace. These findings, laying further foundation for the study of ESS, were in contrast to previous scientific management models which were data-driven. (Weatherburn, 2020).

Differentiation of the construct of soft skills began in earnest in the early 1970s in United States' army literature (Parlami & Monnot, 2019; Touloumakos, 2020). By the mid to late 20th century, the US Army had honed its skills training programs to produce

highly technically trained personnel and organized personnel units. However, it was found that technically trained individuals and units were lacking in some skills critical for success within their organizations, particularly in personnel management (Parlami & Monnott, 2019). Seeking a solution, the United States Continental Army Command (CONARC) joined forces with the Human Resource Research Organization (HumPRO) to gain clarity on what these skills were and how to define them. At the time, military schools were teaching what would later become known as ESS content as chaplain responsibilities, communication and affective skills, etc. Their original definition of the term soft skills referred to them broadly as "... job-related skills involving actions affecting primarily people and paper" (Parlami & Mannott, 2019, p.226). Bringing together leading systems engineering scholars, army educators, and HumPRO consultants, CONARC sought to define and standardize this content. The results of their efforts, in effect, launched the formalization of the construct of ESS (Parlami & Mannott, 2019).

Since CONARC and HumPRO's joint project, ESS have become an established and often studied construct in industrial/organizational psychology. However, researchers still have not reached a consensus on an exact definition of ESS, or even if they should continue to be called ESS (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Rao, 2018). Rao (2018) gives multiple examples of terms used for ESS; behavioral skills, people skills, emotional intelligence, transferable skills, and essential skills inter alia. AbuJbara and Worley (2018) call ESS "non-cognitive" skills, the emotional and social skills necessary for success in leadership in particular.

Language and thinking are inextricably intertwined (Mahon & Kemmerer, 2020).

Words matter, and the words researchers and practitioners use to think about and describe ESS matter. Some researchers such as Parlamis and Monnot (2019) and Ioria et al. (2022) are calling for a change in terminology, arguing that the term “soft skills” diminishes the critically important role ESS play in employee and organizational success. Parlamis and Monnott (2019) advocate for the term CORE to replace “soft skills.” CORE is the acronym for the term the authors coined “Competence in Organizational and Relational Effectiveness.” Utilizing a term such as CORE, rather than ESS, could convey the significance of ESS as critical to organizational functioning, rather than as an accessory to technical skills.

ESS have been categorized as skills because they are commonly described as skills that a person can gain, rather than traits (Touloumakos, 2020). However, the terms ‘qualities’ and ‘traits’ are often seen in ESS literature. This crossover is understandable. For example, having high emotional intelligence could be considered to be a quality, and it can also be considered to be a skill. This crossover has contributed to confounding a consensus on the definition of ESS (Meeks, 2017).

Defining Employee Soft Skills

The formalized acknowledgment of the construct and importance of ESS in the mid to late 1990s set the stage for further study, and researchers now are still working to develop a unified definition of ESS. In an attempt to arrive at a more cohesive definition of ESS, researchers have conducted studies to identify which non-technical skills are most important for employee and organizational success (Ajubara & Worley, 2018; Meeks, 2017; Parlamis & Monnott, 2019; Rao, 2018.) Touloumakos (2020) posits that the research of “soft skills” has been ever-expanding, and that it tends to land in either a

skills requirements or skills characteristics category. Haselberger et al. (2012, p. 67) describe ESS in this way: “Soft Skills represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills. Soft skills help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life.”

If left to researching ESS as skills requirements, the list can become nearly endless, making it difficult to investigate. Some of the challenge in defining ESS is in defining “skills” themselves and the crossover between some skills and traits. Empathy is often mentioned in the literature as a crucial ESS (Boyatzis, 2017; Hausser & Palloni, 2011). Is empathy a skill or a characteristic? An employee could be described as empathetic in much the same way that they could be described as jovial or fastidious. However, empathy can be taught, upregulated, and downregulated; therefore it can be identified as a skill (Riess, 2022). One of the leading understandings of ESS is that they are indeed skills because they can be learned and developed (Touloumakos, 2020). Merriam-Webster (2023), in part, defines skills as “a learned power of doing something competently: a developed aptitude or ability” (Retrieved Sept 22, 2023, from <https://www.merian-webster.com/dictionary/skills>). This ‘learned power,’ and developed aptitude or ability is what make ESS skills rather than traits or characteristics. This is particularly salient in understanding the nature of ESS. If ESS were strictly trait-based, then organizations would perhaps do well to solely focus their efforts on Big 5 traits and personality screenings in their hiring processes as a means of acquisition of ESS (Hilger et al., 2022; Haselberger et al., (2012, p. 67): “Soft Skills represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and

practical skills. Soft skills help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life.”

Vasanthakumari (2019, p. 66) offers this description: “Soft skills refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with.”

If ESS were primarily viewed as traits rather than skills, the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ with strong ESS would widen. Individuals possessing extant high ESS would have more opportunity to rise to the top professionally. Organizations with better resources would hire those individuals helping ensure their success as well. Employees and candidates without well-developed ESS would be left to flounder along with the less-resourced organizations that employ them.

Despite the moniker ‘skills,’ and a call for a unified definition, researchers and organizations continue to hold different views about what constitutes ESS. For example, Cimatti (2016), in a study of the definition of soft skills and their role within organizations, uses the terms ‘traits’ and ‘soft skills’ interchangeably.

Top Identified Soft Skills

A review of the literature reveals a myriad of ESS that have been identified by researchers and employers as important for employee and organizational success. The list is extensive to the point that it is impractical to include all of them in this review. Meeks, 2017 reported findings (rated from 1: least important to 5: most important) from the NACE Job Outlook Survey, a study that included 260 companies, that teamwork ability ranked first (4.61), problem-solving and decision-making ability was second (4.61), and communication skills ranked third (4.60). AbuJbara and Worley, 2018, named

intelligence, wisdom, perspective-taking, ability to solve complex problems, flexibility, motivation, teamwork, collaboration, initiative, organizing, planning, and personal effectiveness as key ESS.

Some studies have focused on determining which ESS are most important in particular sectors. In a study of which ESS are most important for success in the dental profession, Khajeghyasi et al., 2021, sorted 29 ESS into six categories: artistic skills, professional ethics, cognitive skills, communication skills, individual characteristics, and management skills. Jones et al. (2018) found the most important soft skills in the Information Systems sector are critical thinking, attitude, and willingness to learn. Within the public service sector leaders and managers identified adaptability, flexibility, oral and written communication skills, ability to work positively with others, problem-solving, creative thinking, and a desire for continuous learning as necessary ESS (Kinsella & Waite, 2021).

While there is value in determining which ESS are most applicable in various sectors and roles, there has also been a need to determine which ESS are most important overall. This helps researchers and practitioners know which ESS are the most widely applicable and where to focus for further study and development of ESS in individuals. Thankfully, researchers have begun tackling this challenge in an attempt to determine which ESS are commonly accepted as the most critical for employee and organizational success.

Succi and Canovi (2019) attempted to determine the importance of 20 ESS for new graduates (Master's level) in rank order. The 20 ESS they examined were previously identified by Haselberger et al. (2012). Succi and Canovi's sample came from European countries, primarily Italy and Germany, and included 800 Human Resource managers and

1,200 masters' students who were either currently enrolled or were less than two years post-graduation. Participants were asked to rank the importance of the 20 ESS for employment using a Likert scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). The top seven skills identified by all respondents were (in rank order):

1. Communication skills (4.67)
2. Commitment to work (4.61)
3. Teamwork skills (4.56)
4. Learning skills (4.43)
5. Stress tolerance (4.41)
6. Analytical skills (4.38)
7. Continuous improvement skills (4.38).

It is interesting to note that Life Balance, Leadership, and Management skills were ranked as the least important for the new graduates. The authors note that their findings may be reflective of the delimitations of the study given that only ESS required for new graduates were examined. What was more surprising is that cultural adaptability skills were considered to be of low importance by the participants in this study even though they came from several different European countries.

Marcel Robles (2012) conducted a two-phase study to identify the top 10 ESS executives report as important. The sample included 49 executives, who returned a total of 517 ESS, which after coding were consolidated into 26 ESS. In the second phase of the study, participants were asked to assign a rank order to the 10 most frequently listed ESS. Fletcher and Thornton (2023) reexamined these findings a decade later to look for possible changes over time in which ESS employers valued most. Their study was

prompted by changes in the workplace, several of which have been a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fletcher and Thornton cite increased working from home, increased use of video platforms such as Zoom to carry out work tasks, and “quiet quitting” due to employee perceptions of poor management as significant changes in the workforce that impact which ESS are now most valued. A comparison of the rank order results of Robles’ and Fletcher and Thornton’s studies is found in Table 1 (Fletcher & Thornton, 2023, p. 10).

Table 1

Rank Order Comparison of Robles’ 2012 Findings and Fletcher and Thornton’s 2023 Findings

Robles (2012)	Mean Rating	Phase 2	Mean Rating
Integrity	4.93	Integrity	4.56
Communication	4.91	Adaptable	4.56
Courtesy	4.81	Conscientious	4.49
Responsibility	4.63	Partnership	4.35
Interpersonal Skills	4.46	Agency	4.32
Positive Attitude	4.35	Social Skills	4.23
Professionalism	4.35	Genuine Care	4.18
Flexibility	4.18	Create Clarity	4.16
Work Ethic	4.12	Positive Energy	4.09
Teamwork Skills	4.12	Contextual Awareness	4.09
		Engage the Mess	3.94
		Suppress the Noise	3.92
		Curiosity	3.85
		Play	3.41

Note: Values were based on a scale of 1 (least) to 5 (most) important.

Fletcher and Thornton’s (2023) study highlights the importance of tracking the evolution of which ESS are most valued at given points in time. The workforce and nature of organizations continue to evolve and may do so rapidly in the coming years due

to events such as the Industrial Revolution 4.0, increased globalization, and the increased incorporation of AI in work processes (Husin et al., 2022). COVID-19 has taught society and the work world that unexpected changes may also emerge that will shape the future of work and what is required for the success of both individuals and organizations. In this rapidly changing environment, flexibility of thinking and adaptability are, and will be, highly valued ESS (Husin et al., 2022).

To date, there is no single definitive study that has identified which ESS merit inclusion in the top 10 ranking. However, we do have enough information to know which ESS are consistently reported as most valuable. Table 2 depicts various ESS that have emerged in academic literature included in this review.

Table 2



Note: AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Boyatzis et al., 2017; Fletcher & Thornton, 2023; Husin et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2018; Robles, 2012; Royo, 2019

Definition of Soft Skills for This Study

James Heckman, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2000 said that “Soft Skills predict success in life” (Cinque, 2015). Heckman arrived at this definition based on a cause-effect relationship between ESS and an individual’s professional and personal achievements. For the purposes of this study, ESS are defined as skills rather than traits or characteristics. The ESS this study examined can be categorized as intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that impact both employee and organizational success. Based on this review of literature, 10 ESS have been selected that merit inclusion in the top 10 lists of importance and are found in Table 3, each of which can be learned or augmented.

Table 3

10 Identified Most Valuable Employee Soft Skills (Unranked)

Skills	
Teamwork	Empathy
Problem Solving	Learning
Decision Making	Adaptability
Communication	Integrity
Interpersonal	Creativity

Importance of Employee Soft Skills for Employee and Organizational Success

While the definition of ESS is still a source of debate, and as of yet there is no commonly agreed upon set of ESS identified as most valuable, the importance of ESS for employee and organizational success is well established. It has been demonstrated that

ESS have a direct impact on increasing employee productivity (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018). In fact, it is reported that companies may now consider ESS to be more important than ever, and this is not altered by industry type or company size (Jones, 2018; Succi & Canovi, 2019). Cimatti (2016) reports that enterprises often hire new employees taking their ESS into account more than their technical or hard skills. ESS are known to increase productivity in the workplace, and hard or technical skills are no longer enough for employees to secure or thrive in employment (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018). Kinsella & Waite (2021) determined from their study conducted with leaders in the public sector that hard skills may get a candidate an interview, but it is their ESS that will get them hired.

Predating Husin et al.'s (2022) assertion that ESS will become more important than ever in the rapidly evolving employment realm, Roa (2018) concluded that a shift is taking place, moving the world from an economy of knowledge to an economy of self-knowledge. Roa asserts that this shift heightens the importance of ESS; as technology takes over more technical tasks, the human element becomes more salient for human employees.

This is particularly true in leadership roles. The identification and study of ESS was first investigated regarding leadership competencies, and the evolving marketplace is nudging the study and practice of ESS back to a focus on leadership (Boyatzis et al., 2017; Roa, 2018.) Among these competencies for effective leadership are compassion, sense-making, communication, sensitivity, problem-solving ability, flexibility, and responsiveness. This allows leaders to effectively cultivate organizational culture and to

lead employees who represent diverse backgrounds (Boyatzis et al., 2017; Paakkanen et al., 2021).

Current Means of Addressing Soft Skills Development

The primary means of intentionally developing ESS are currently via workplace trainings or educational curricula (Andres, 2021; Hirsch, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Recognizing the need for graduates to possess strong ESS to obtain employment and to thrive in their employment, universities, particularly those with business schools, have woven ESS into their classroom learning activities (Hirsch, 2017). Succi and Canovai (2020) posit that ESS should be integrated into curricula as early as high school, and should continue through university for those students who continue their education.

Hirsch (2017) noted a significant disparity in the unemployment rates of Black youth and White youth. The unemployment rate for Black youth who had graduated high school but not gone on to college was 34% higher than for White youth. Hirsch conducted a study that used simulated job interviews utilizing standardized questions and HR professionals as the interviewers to help ascertain what was contributing to the gap. The HR professionals noted ESS, particularly those related to maturity and communication, significantly impacted their assessment of the youth's employability. Results indicated that possessing stronger ESS could make a difference in closing the employment gap for Black youth. To quote a famous line of Oprah Winfrey, "When you know better, you do better," (sources unk.). In order to do better, Hirsch advocates for the inclusion of ESS training in high school curricula. Two of the interventions he proposed were training teachers to teach ESS, and interweaving ESS into course curriculum.

Acknowledging that learning is a long-term process, AbuJbara and Worley (2018)

also advocate for the inclusion of ESS training in both high school and college curricula. Schools are now incorporating ESS into hard skills courses such as mathematics and information technology. In particular, they posit that ESS training is crucial for raising future generations of leaders, and some business schools are incorporating ESS training in their leadership development programs.

Beyond high school and university, AbuJbara and Worley recommend that HR professionals ascertain which ESS are most pertinent in their organizations and offer specific ESS training to develop them. Suchi and Canovi (2020) recommend that universities and employers join forces to help students understand the importance of ESS and how to take responsibility for developing those skills in themselves. Andres (2021) encourages the development of some elements of ESS through regular physical education courses. He asserts that this can increase ESS as well as promote overall physical and mental fitness and facilitates better absorption of learning. Bausell et al., (2020) recommend mentoring relationships for the improvement of ESS.

Acumen Research and Consulting (retrieved from [globalwire.com](https://www.globalwire.com) on 4/2/23) reports that the market for ESS training programs will nearly triple in this decade. There are a number of private companies that offer these training programs both online and off. The authors forecast the ESS market size to be greater than 66 million USD by 2030. ESS are so critical to employee and organizational success, and the gap between the level of ESS needed and possessed by employees is so great that companies providing ESS training are becoming significant players in the marketplace.

Need for Increased Soft Skills

A nationwide survey done by Northeastern University found that 73% of C-suite-level

executives believe there is a skills gap in the current workforce. Further, 87% of these business leaders do not believe that this generation of college graduates possess the ESS to succeed (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018). Supporting research has found that more than one-third of corporations believe individuals entering the job market in the United States (US) today do not have adequate ESS, and that if this isn't corrected, the US will fall behind other developed countries in regard to workforce talent (Berg & Carson, 2020). The need for more well-developed ESS, which account for the majority of workplace success, is obvious and undisputed. Despite efforts to include ESS awareness and training in educational curricula and workplace trainings either provided by organization staff or by a third-party platform, the gap remains significant, suggesting a need to expand the means of developing ESS. This is the impetus for this study examining the impact, if any, of SD on the development of ESS.

Definition of Social Dance

This review of the literature for the proposed study now turns to SD. SD is an activity that has evolved through the millennia and decades as music and society have changed, and it continues to evolve. Varga (1972), a professor of physical education, described SD in part as the creatively applied and self-controlled physical contact of the male and female in established dance forms such as foxtrot, samba, paso doble, blues, swing, and waltz inter alia. While many of the particular dances identified by Varga in 1972 are still popular today, the definition of “partnered dance” as the engagement of male lead and female follow dancers has shifted to reflect expanding definitions of stereotypical gender roles. These types of SD still require the physical contact of the lead and follow dancers; however, they are now referred to as just that, “lead” and “follow” and it is expected that

any gender can perform either role. A smaller number of social dancers are skilled in both and may shift between the two in different dances with different partners. This shifting between lead and follow roles can be thought of as almost a type of ambidexterity given that the footwork, lead prompts, and follow responses are distinctly different, and sometimes opposite, between the lead and follow roles.

The numerous proven benefits of dance for physical, mental, brain, and social health are beyond the scope of this review and study. The following portion of this literature review provides an overview of some of the benefits that may be pertinent to ESS. This includes neurological and cognitive health, mood improvement and stress reduction, physical benefits, social connection, empathy, creativity, and performance and well-being.

Neurological and Cognitive Benefits of Dance

When reviewing the extant literature on the impact of dance on neurological and cognitive functioning, it is more common to uncover research that is focused on the impact of dance on those with neurological or cognitive deficits or departures from what would be considered to be normed functioning. For example, a fair number of studies have been conducted investigating the impact of dance on the aging brain and the functioning of those with disorders such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke, and Autism. Dance has proven to be beneficial nearly across the board for people suffering from these conditions, with improvements in synchronization of movement, reduction in falls, improvements in working memory, and increased brain plasticity (Aguñaga et al., 2022; Brancatisano et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2020; Rehfeldt et al., 2018). Dance has been found to help alleviate the negative symptoms of Autism and improve both cognition and

cognitive flexibility in older adults (Beatriz et al., 2020; Mitterová et al., 2021; Predovan et al., 2019). Some of the benefits of dance are induced by the music involved, which Brancatisano et al. (2020) asserts can be emotional, persuasive, and engaging, as well as physical.

Some of these populations may be considered to be at higher risk than those of the general population. For example, Aguiñaga et al. (2022) focused their study on middle and older-aged Latinos who they assert may be at risk of lower engagement in physical activities that may promote health. The authors examined the impact of Latin dance as a means of increasing working memory. Liao et al. (2020) examined the impact of square dancing and found that square dance increased cognitive processing ability, but not overall memory in their subjects. Findings such as these will become even more relevant to the workforce as the population continues to age and individuals continue working to older ages. Workers aged 60 and over are expected to become the largest expanding population in the workforce (Burke & Grandey, 2020). Predovan et al. (2019) discussed the need for successful, innovative strategies to improve and maintain cognition among aging adults to help facilitate their high-level contributions to society. They suggest dance as one means of accomplishing this.

While it is very relevant to examine the neuro-cognitive impact of dance on special populations solely for the sake of functioning and quality of life, these special populations also make up a portion of the workforce. Concurrently, the primary population represented in the workforce is comprised of individuals who would be considered to be neuro-cognitively healthy, or not at-risk. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of dance on neuro-cognitively healthy individuals as well, and

while this phenomenon has not been as extensively studied, SD has proven to be beneficial for this population as well (Giacoso et al., 2016; Lakes et al., 2016). Included in these benefits of physical exercise and dance are increased ability for memorization and learning, the ability to reason logically, and the ability to perform complex tasks (Vecchi et al., 2022).

Giacoso et al. (2016) conducted a thorough study, including brain imaging, amongst a more normative population of accomplished musicians and dancers. They compared white matter diffusivity and fanning of fibers between the groups and found that both were activity-dependent. While the authors noted that there may be some confounding overlap between the two groups, they concluded that making music produced one type of fiber branching and dancing another type. This provides evidence that brain plasticity can be activity-induced and activity-dependent, with extensive training providing robust results. Both dancing and playing music were shown to be beneficial for brain plasticity as compared to controls, but dancing makes broader connections within the brain. The authors hypothesize that this may be because dancing engages more parts of the body than playing a musical instrument does.

Mood Elevation and Stress Reduction

Both self-report studies and interventional studies have revealed dance as having a positive impact on alleviating depression, and leisure activities that involve socializing and exercise help alleviate work stress (Akandere & Demir, 2011; Lakes et al., 2016; Vecchi et al., 2022; Winwood et al., 2007; Zajenkowski et al., 2015). Mood improvements are self-reported by a majority of recreational dancers (Lakes et al., 2016). Lakes et al. (2016) conducted a study with a sample of 225 dancers investigating their

perceptions of the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional impact of SD. Interestingly, women expressed experiencing greater improvements in mood than men did, which was described as feeling happier and less depressed. Also of note was that dancers who danced for recreation, rather than competition, reported great improvements in mood (Lakes et al., 2016; Zajenkowski et al., 2015).

An intervention study, in which the treatment group received dance training three times per week for 12 weeks, proved to be effective in reducing depression levels amongst the participants as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory. The control group in this study showed no statistically significant improvements. The authors of the study concluded that regular dance training is useful as a treatment for mild to moderate depression (Akandere & Demir, 2011). Lock et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on the psychotherapeutic impact of dance interventions, which further confirmed dance intervention as an effective therapeutic intervention to reduce depression and anxiety, revealing a medium overall effect.

It is salient to note that dancing does not always result in stress reduction or mood improvement. However, even when dancers experience emotions that could be described as negative such as rejection, feeling left out, sadness, or anger, these can have a paradoxical impact on the dancer to try again, producing persistence and resiliency (Alfredsson Olsson & Heikkinen, 2019). These more challenging emotions can co-exist, or alternate with, the more positive and mood-elevating emotions dancers report such as joy, flow, energy, and social belonging.

Embodiment, Social Connection, and Empathic Concern in SD

SD, as defined in this study, always includes at least one other person (the dance

partner) whom the social dancer must consider in addition to other factors in the environment. As such, SD is an expression of embodied cognition. Researchers have concluded that cognition involves more than computational mechanisms and that actions resulting from cognition include stimuli from the body, the senses, and the environment in which it takes place, including other people (Giguere, 2021). This newer focus on embodiment as a form of cognition highlights some of the complexity of human's relationships with themselves and others and how stimuli, cognition, and action are linked together. This relationship can be seen in the work of Hinson et al. (2021), in their small-scale, interventional, mixed-methods study of older adults' body appreciation and either social engagement or isolation. Dance intervention was linked to stronger body appreciation, which in turn was tied to social engagement. The more positively the participants perceived their bodies, the more likely they were to initiate and maintain social connections.

Another element in this stimuli-to-cognition-to-action loop related to SD is personality traits and how those impact the process of SD and the social dancers. SD has been examined regarding personality traits using the Five-Factor Model, such as in Carlson et al.'s (2018) study examining the impact of self-reported traits, particularly empathy, and dynamic interactions between various dance partners. A correlation was found between self-reported levels of empathy and greater variation in response to one's dance partners. The correlation was strongest for males, but also statistically significant for females. The higher the level of empathy, the greater the variation in response to the dynamic interaction with different dance partners.

Wu et al. (2023) assert that dance training can positively influence cognitive and emotional functioning. When participating in dance training with others, partnered dancing affords participants the opportunity to identify, comprehend, and share in the feelings and thoughts of their dance partners, in part through the use of nonverbal cues (Lakes et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2023). Wu et al. conducted their study with a sample of 43 (N=43) long-term ballroom dancers and a control group of 40 (N=40) sex and age-matched non-dancers. In a self-report trait survey, the ballroom dancers were shown to have a higher level of empathic concern than the non-dancers. This data was supported by results from high-resolution magnetic resonance imaging. Though a positive correlation was seen overall, it is of note that increased numbers of dance partners revealed a negative correlation. The strongest correlation was seen in dancers who trained with the same partner over a long period of time. While dance interactions may, or may not, be partner-specific, all cultures participate in forms of dance. The nature of the dances may differ significantly, but dance is believed to serve some of the same functions in social connectedness across cultures (Fink et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Lakes et al. (2016) also indicates that the length of time a dancer has been dancing is related to the degree of positive outcomes. They found a correlation between greater positive perceived social benefits and how long a dancer has been dancing. Their study did not show a correlation between the frequency of dancing and perceived social benefit. Taken together with the Wu et al. (2023) study, this seems to indicate that the length of time a dancer has trained or danced may be a significant factor in social benefits and that those benefits may be more apparent longitudinally.

Physical Benefits of Dance

Many of the physical benefits of physical exercise are common knowledge, and social dance is no exception. Dance has been shown to improve overall health and fitness, promote weight loss, reduce deaths due to cardiovascular incidents, promote postural stability, and aid in the prevention of falls (Lakes et al., 2016; Merom et al., 2016; Vella-Burrows et al., 2021; Vecchi et al., 2022; Zang et al., 2008). Additionally, safe physical touch is found to be health-promoting in SD (Chapell et al., 2021). These results seem to be dose-dependent. McRary et al. (2021) reported that just 30 to 60 minutes of ballroom or other types of SD has a positive impact on health. As little as 30 minutes produces acute benefits, and 60 minutes of ongoing, weekly participation produces long-term health improvements. Merom et al. (2016) posit that medium-intensity dance shows benefit in the reduction of death resulting from cardiovascular incidents. Light-intensity dancing did not show the same benefit. Dancers reported dose-dependent improvements in their physical health. The frequency and length of their participation in SD were found to be highly predictive of dancers' perception of the physical benefits of SD ($p=.001$).

Dance and Creativity

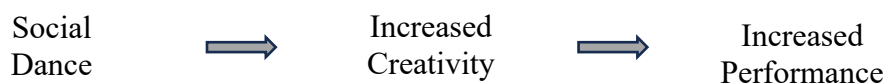
It is common knowledge that work activities and responsibilities can be stress-producing, and researchers have long been interested in the relationship between stress, stress reduction, and job performance. Eschleman et al. (2014) conducted two studies to investigate the relationship between creative non-work activities on recovery from the high-stress demands of job performance and productivity. The authors highlight the reality that employees have limited time windows in which to choose which non-work activities they engage in, importing the significance of the choices made for well-being.

The first study was self-rated and the second was coworker rated. Both were conducted to evaluate the impact of creative non-work activities on relaxation, control, and mastery (categorized as recovery experiences) and extra-role behaviors and work creativity (categorized as performance outcomes). Non-work creative activities were found to be positively related to both recovery and performance.

The Eschleman et al. (2014) study did not specifically mention dance as one of the influencing creative activities. However, Chappell et al. (2021) focused specifically on dance as a creative activity impacting health and well-being, inherently confirming dance as a creative expression and lending validity to the impact of dance on creativity. Chappell et al.'s study was conducted as a literature review, the parameters of which were guided by pertinent content and methodological rigor. A concept of note that the authors addressed was that of dance as co-creativity, which SD is by nature. SD can be an integral part of well-being and increased creativity, both of which positively impact employee well-being and performance in the workplace.

Figure 1

The Impact of SD on Creativity and Performance



(Chappell et al., 2021; Eschleman et al., 2014)

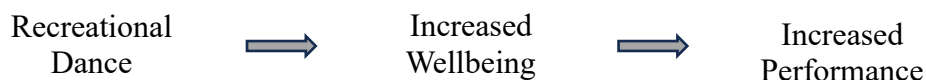
The Impact of Dance on Well-being and Performance

Well-being is a construct that encompasses multiple aspects of physical, mental, relational, and functional elements of positive experience and functioning. The Centers for Disease Control summarizes well-being to include the following high levels of

functioning; mental health, social health, and physical health (retrieved from www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing on 8/13/2023.) The physical, mental health, mood, and social benefits of dance addressed above in this literature review are components of well-being. In simple terms, unhappiness impairs productivity, and subjective happiness and/or well-being promotes it (DiMaria et al., 2019; Vecchi et al., 2022). Dance is one activity that has been shown to promote subjective well-being and, in turn, increase productivity (Vecchi et al., 2022).

Figure 2

Dance as an Antecedent to Increased Performance



(Eschleman et al., 2014; DiMaria, et al., 2019; Vecchi et al., 2022)

Experiential Adult Learning

Adult learners naturally bring more prior experience and prior learning to current learning activities and opportunities than younger learners do. There are some generally agreed upon factors that impact adult learning, and that differentiate andragogy from pedagogy. Adult learners are more likely than younger learners to: have a self-concept that includes agency over their learning processes, know what they need to learn, want choice in what they learn, and want to understand how the learning applies to future tasks and situations (Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Palis & Quiros, 2014). Honoring previous learning, and the adult learner's assessments of their learning needs has been identified as an important component of successfully harnessing learning opportunities. As pointed out by Allen et al. (2022), learning, training, education, and development are not the

same thing. Education and training can result in learning, which is more compressive. Development is the ability to leverage learning.

There is no universal adult learning model, nor is there a consensus on one employee learning or development model (Allen et al., 2022; Morris, 2020). Allen et al. (2022) posit that there is an over-reliance on cognitive learning in employee training or learning and that a more comprehensive, or immersive, approach can be helpful. Kolb's 1984 theory on experiential adult learning is still possibly the most studied, and widely referred to, model of experiential learning to date (Kolb, 2015; Morris, 2020). Kolb's cycle of Experiential Learning Cycle: concrete experience \Rightarrow reflective \Rightarrow observation \Rightarrow abstract conceptualization \Rightarrow active experimentation.

Experiential learning theories, such as Kolb's assert that true learning cannot take place without experience, making experience central to the learning process. Experiential learning can bridge one of the gaps in education, the time between knowledge acquisition and the use of the information or learning. In experiential learning experiences, the learner has the opportunity to acquire, practice, and evaluate the learning in situ, and in real time, which is essential for the acquisition and application of ESS (Succi & Canovi, 2022).

While Kolb's (2015) Experiential Learning Cycle has been well studied, Morris (2020) asserts that some elements need further exploration to understand what makes the cycle effective. Their analysis identified several themes that contributed to learning in this model and hence suggested the following modifications to Kolb's model; learners must be involved as active participants; what is taught should be situated in the context of place and time; and the learners should be presented with novel experiences related to

real-world problems and take risks in their learning. Critical reflection is then necessary as a mediator of the learning, completing a process that allows the learner to incorporate the learning into future experiences. For retention, it is important that adult learners have choice in the learning process, understand what the benefit of the learning will be, and have opportunities to practice and assimilate it in light of previous experience (Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Morris, 2020; Palis & Quiros, 2014).

Active learning is a means of learning in which the learner participates beyond reading, watching, or listening to conveyed content, such as in traditional classroom or lecture-based learning. It is argued that active learning is not yet a clearly defined construct, but studies show that it can be harnessed to expand learning in the ability to function well in groups or teams (Betti et al., 2022; Lombardi et al., 2021). Group active learning, beyond simply influencing the individual learner, impacts the development of skills such as adaptability, the ability to recognize other team members' needs and to adjust behaviors accordingly, communication, and mutual trust (Betti et al., 2022).

Active learning pairs well with collaborative and/or team learning, in which the learners work together to learn related to a common goal. Further, active learning impacts leader-follower relationships. Learning with active and frequent feedback loops has been demonstrated to facilitate positive Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationships. Follower's perceptions of their leader impacts the quality of the leader's behaviors and can serve as an antecedent to high-quality LMX relationships in which communication is high and ambiguity is low (Avoco et al., 2022).

Transfer of Life Skills

Life skills are sometimes described using the same, or similar words to ESS. For example, conscientiousness, persistence, emotional stability, optimism, and determination were examined by Steptoe and Wardle (2017) in relationship to their contribution to health, wealth, and well-being later in life. The authors found these skills to be longitudinally synergistic in promoting economic well-being and success for individuals. Higher scores on these skills were correlated with higher self-reported financial success, health, and personal well-being. The authors pointed out that it is the accumulation of life skills over time that promotes success, rather than the development of one of the particular life skills included in the study. The acquisition of new, or improved, skills builds on previously held skills, and combines in a manner of multiplication, rather than merely addition.

Pierce et al. (2017) conducted a critical literature review of studies that addressed the transfer of learning in sports psychology and other learning-based disciplines. Based on their findings, the authors developed a model of transfer of life skills that forms the bulk of the theoretical foundation for this study. This model was chosen due to the similarities in processes and constructs, and in the absence of an extant theoretical model specifically designed for examining the relationship, if any, of SD skills on the development of ESS. In Pierce et al.'s study, the authors evaluated the transfer of skills learned in sports to non-sports domains of life, hence the term, 'transfer of life skills.'

Pierce et al.' (2017) assert that the transfer of life skills is not an act of moving skills between domains in a simple transaction; factors impacting the transfer of skills learned to another domain are complex. The authors proposed the following definition for

transfer of learning in the sports psychology realm: “The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a personal asset (i.e., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned” (Peirce et al., 2018, p.194).

Based on their study findings, Pierce et al. (2017) proposed three stages or defining factors to their model; 1. recognition that learners bring their previous learning and history to the sports skill being learned, 2. acknowledgment that different factors (learning environment, coaches, methods used, etc.) impact the learning process, and 3. acknowledgment that environmental conditions and how those are interpreted by the learner impact the success of the skill transfer process. The authors conclude that the transfer of life skills is an ongoing, dynamic process between the learner, the needs, and the environment. Pierce et al.’s study was conducted regarding the transfer of sports skills to life skills, rather than social dance skills to ESS. However, it provides a plausible platform and theoretical model from which to approach this study. The similarities in learning sports skills and dance skills, and the similarities in the transfer of those skills from one domain to another, make the model plausibly applicable to this study.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

ESS in Scripture

The term ‘Employee Soft Skills’ was not coined until the 1970s; hence, like many other constructs pertinent to industrial/organizational psychology, they are not specifically mentioned by name in the Bible (Parlami & Mannot, 2019; Touloumakos,

2020). A search of scholarly literature on ESS in scripture does not return many results; this is a niche that has a great deal of room for continued scientific research. However, an interested reader or practitioner can find articles and books written by Christian authors related to these concepts, such as those from the organization, Theology of Work (theologyofwork.com).

Like many other scientific realities that have been discovered, or defined, in the years since the canon was closed, the foundation for ESS can be seen in scripture. Biblical authors addressed the importance of intra and interpersonal skills numerous times in the Bible. The book of Proverbs is sometimes referred to as the “Book of Wisdom,” and in it can be seen themes congruent with ESS such as; integrity, moral development, making wise choices, social justice, humility, and knowing when to speak or hold your tongue (Proverbs; Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible; Ogden Bellis, 2022).

Perhaps the most important umbrella for ESS in the Bible can be seen in an exchange between Jesus and a lawyer. When the lawyer questioned Jesus as to what the greatest law was, Jesus replied as follows. “And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸ This is the great and ^[a]foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰ Upon these two commandments ^[b]hang the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40, New American Standard Bible). It can be asserted that individuals cannot love to the fullest extent possible without well-developed soft skills. Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills are essential to loving well in any domain of life. In a very real sense, ESS are nested within the two greatest commandments to love God and to love others as we love ourselves. Further confirming

the importance of the role of love, and hence the skills needed in order to love well, are the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 (New American Standard Bible). Paul asserted that love is to be our overarching motivational force and is the most enduring thing. All other things, including work, will pass away; only that born of love will remain.

Even though ESS are not specifically mentioned in scripture, some of the more specific aspects of ESS are also embedded in the text. For example, researchers have identified resiliency to be an essential part of employee, organizational, and personal functioning (Berg & Carson, 2020). Resiliency is generally defined as the ability to bounce back, is a component of grit, and is a skill that is crucial to employee and organizational success (Agaibi, 2018; Berg & Carson, 2020).

The Bible speaks to this from several vantage points, one of the most crucial of which is hope. Hope provides motivation to try again when we have failed and empowers us to persevere when we have not yet seen desired outcomes. The Apostle Paul, who is thought to be the author of the Book of Romans (Romans 5:3-5, New American Standard Bible) teaches that difficulties can result in endurance, which can, in turn, result in hope. In this passage, we see the intersection of psychological realities associated with positive psychology, ESS, and biblical truth (Agaibi, Berg & Carson, Romans 5:3-5, New American Standard Bible). Berg and Carson have suggested teaching biblically-based resiliency in Business curriculum. There are certainly other ESS that could be taught in academic settings, whether from a biblical, or other, foundation. However, this leads back to the current state of ESS; despite inclusion in educational curricula, an ESS void remains in employees and organizations.

Dance in Scripture

Dance is a universal phenomenon, with all cultures practicing forms of dance both individually and communally (Fink et al., 2021). This of course includes the communities written about in the Bible. There are roughly 27 mentions of dance in the Bible; the number varies slightly depending on translation (retrieved from on 10/22/2023: How many times is dance mentioned in the Bible? - Christian Faith Guide.com). Most often, when dance is referred to in the Bible, it is in the context of worship and praise (Exodus 15:20, Psalm 149:3, New American Standard Bible). It is also mentioned in conjunction with emotions of gladness, celebration, gratitude, and joy (2 Samuel 6:14, Luke 15:25, New American Standard Bible).

The first mention of dance in the Bible is in Exodus 15:20 when the people of Israel danced in celebration of God parting the Red Sea, a salt-water lake that lies below sea level between modern-day Israel and Jordan, enabling them to pass through it in safety. Many readers of the Bible view the parting of the sea strictly as a miracle, while some scientists have studied the phenomenon and suggested it may have occurred through a natural incident called wind set-down (Drews & Hahn, 2010). Whether the event was miraculous, natural, or a combination of both, it is thought by scholars to have taken place around 3,000 years ago. Garfkinkle (2018) asserts evidence exists of humans dancing as early as 40,000 years ago, long pre-dating the Red Sea event. Of course, the Israelites were not the only ancient culture that associated dance with worship given that dance is a universal phenomenon (Fink, 2021). There is evidence from other ancient cultures, such as Roman and Egyptian, that used dance as a part of their religious practices (Schlapbach, Edt., 2023; Spencer, 2003).

Perhaps one of the most referred to instances of dance seen in scripture is when David danced vigorously in joyful worship to God in celebration of bringing the Ark of the Covenant back from Baalah in Judah (2 Samuel:6, Holy Bible, New Living Translation). He danced so vigorously, without self-consciousness of his person or position, that one of his wives felt contempt for him and criticized him. This is a pointed example of how dance can be an embodiment of joy, celebration, and worship.

Music is often, but not always, associated with dance. The harp and shofar (ram's horn) were repeatedly referred to as instruments used in worship in scripture, and both are mentioned as instruments used in celebration at the time when King David danced in celebration of recapturing the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6, Holy Bible, New Living Translation). It is quite possible that these instruments were part of the musical backdrop in which King David danced (Lebaka, 2014).

Transfer of Skills in Scripture

Transfer of Skills, as with ESS, is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. However, as is also the case with ESS, biblical foundations for the construct are embedded in the teachings of the Bible. Proverbs 11:3 (New American Standard Bible) teaches that integrity will guide the upright. The original Hebrew word in the text for 'integrity' is *tummah*, which indicates a moral wholeness (retrieved from biblereference.com on 10/26/23). Moral wholeness, or soundness, guides individuals in their actions. While this is character-based, it shares elements with ESS, which are skill-based. As previously mentioned, ESS are learned, honed, and utilized across multiple domains in our lives. For example, decision making ability is not restricted to either work or non-work domains; we must make decisions in all domains of our lives. Hence, while there may be

some variation across domains and inputs, it is likely that an individual with strong decision-making skills in one domain will draw on those in other domains.

Another teaching in the Bible that is pertinent to the Transfer of Skills is the reality that our inner thoughts and beliefs are evidenced in our outer actions. Jesus taught that a tree is known by its fruit; a good tree will produce good fruit, and a bad tree will produce bad fruit (Matthew 12:33, New American Standard Bible). This, again, refers back to integrity and congruency, who and how a person is consistent across domains.

Conclusion on Biblical Support

The Bible contains multiple direct references to dance, including what prompted the dancing at times, such as joy, worship, celebration, and gladness (Ecclesiastes 3:4, Psalm 30; 11-12). Dance appears to be an assumed part of life in scripture, and is encouraged, if not commanded, as an act of worship, as seen in Psalm 139:1-4, in which the Psalmist says, “Sing to the LORD a new song.

Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.

² O Israel, rejoice in your Maker.

O people of Jerusalem,^[a] exult in your King.

³ Praise his name with dancing,

accompanied by tambourine and harp.”

Dance is an integral part of all cultures, from ancient to modern. It is a part of life in societies, whether or not any given individual participates in dance. Dance is universal in the human experience, and believers are encouraged, if not flat-out instructed, to dance in worship.

The Bible, however, doesn't make specific references to ESS or the transfer of life skills. What the Bible does contain, is the underlying platform for understanding ESS as skills of inter and intrapersonal functioning. We also see multiple references to integrity and congruency, which intimate that who and how we are in one domain is who and how we are in all domains (Proverbs 11:3, Holy Bible; 2 Corinthians 8:21). Most importantly, we see in scripture that ESS fall under the greatest injunction given my God to mankind; to love God, love ourselves, and love others. The biblical foundation for this study rests on a three-fold understanding that; 1. ESS can be encompassed in the commandments to love God, others, and ourselves as the primary focus of life, 2. dance is an assumed and multipurpose part of life, and 3. we are called to have integrity/soundness across all domains of life. In short, the Bible supports the use of dance for expressive and productive purposes, and the nesting of ESS under the greatest commandment.

Summary

The importance of ESS to both employee and organizational success cannot be overstated. With up to 85% of successful functioning in the workplace attributed to ESS, and the ongoing void in ESS in the workplace, it is imperative that scientists and practitioners press forward in identifying effective means of developing ESS (Iorio et al., 2022; nationalskills.org).

The study of ESS was born in the early 1900s, was examined in more earnest with the CONARC studies, and was tackled with more specificity in the 1970s (Touloumakos, 2020). In response to these studies, researchers and practitioners have integrated ESS into workplace trainings and school curricula (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Baussell et al., 2020; Betti et al, 2022). Yet, this has not turned the tide on the ESS deficit. Therefore, we

must look beyond what is already being done to novel means of developing ESS. SD may be one of those means. It is plausible, based on the transfer of life skills theory, to look to the soft skills obtained in SD as potentially transferable to ESS. It has been established that adults learn best in chosen, interactive environments in which they have the opportunity to put their learning to use. Dance, as a self-selected activity, provides a rich environment for adult learning.

Dance is known to have been an integral part of civilizations for millennia, and is a universal phenomenon (Fink et al., 2021). Research on dance indicates that it can significantly contribute to an individual's well-being and functioning. Dance has neurological, cognitive, physical health, mental health, stress reduction, social connection, and empathy-promoting benefits (Beatriz et al., 2020; Carlson et al.'s, 2018; Liao et al., 2020). Additionally, dance is shown to increase creativity, which in turn has been shown to increase productivity (Chappell et al., 2021; Eschleman et al., 2014). All of these benefits bring value to both workers and organizations. While as of yet unstudied, based on information in this literature review, it makes sense to study the impact, if any, of SD on the development of ESS.

In addition to the broader body of research on ESS, SD, and transfer of life skills, there is scriptural support pertinent to these topics. Engagement in dance, love as the underpinning of ESS, and integrity and congruency in the ways we engage others and the world we live in are all seen in the Bible (Matthew 22:37-40; Psalm 30:11-12; Psalm 149:3; Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 22:37-40). In combination, what is known about the history and current state of ESS, the benefits of dance, adult learning, transfer of life skills, and biblical support provide the background and foundation for this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

This chapter addresses the methods that were used for this study. This includes information about the sample size, demographics, and recruitment strategies. The study question, questions posed to the participants, method of conducting the study, confidentiality, data protection, and means of data analysis are also included.

Research Question

RQ 1: How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills on the development of their employee soft skills?

Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative, narrative, and content analysis study. Social dancer participants were interviewed individually by the researcher in semi-structured interviews, utilizing predetermined, open-ended questions. Utilizing a qualitative, narrative, and content analysis approach to this study allowed social dancer participants to use their own thoughts and words to describe their experiences and observations related to the impact, if any, of their SD skills on the development of their ESS.

Participants

Participant Demographics

All participants were working adults of any gender, between the ages of 20 and 70 who are employed at least part-time in the state of Colorado, in the United States of America, and are fluent in the English language. The social dancer sample size was 12

participants. Participants were experienced social dancers who met the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for social dancers includes the following:

1. The social dancer has engaged in social dance for at least two years.
2. The social dancer has taken at least five social dance lessons.
3. The social dancer dances on average two times per month or more.
4. The social dancer considers themselves to be at least at an intermediate skill level.
5. The social dancer has been employed for at least two years out of the previous five.
6. The social dancer is employed in a position that is at least 50% in-person (rather than remote work).

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria for social dancers includes the following:

1. The social dancer does not meet one or more of the above inclusion criteria.
2. The social dancer is not fluent in spoken and written English.
3. The social dancer is not available to participate in the interview process in the necessary time frame for the study.

Justification for Sample Size

A sample size of 12 social dancers was anticipated to provide sufficient data to examine for similarities, differences, and themes. Simultaneously, this sample size proved viable without a prohibitive quantity of data to examine given the narrative approach to the study.

Permissions to Recruit

Initial study permission was sought from the IRB of Liberty University. No permissions were needed for word-of-mouth recruitment. Permissions to recruit were obtained from owners or administrators of the social media group. The final source of recruitment was physical or electronic bulletin boards at social dance venues in the Denver, Colorado metro area. Permission to recruit in these venues was obtained from the owners or designated managers. No further permissions were needed due to the social dancers being adults who are able to consent for themselves.

Study Procedures

Recruitment of Participants

The first of the participants were recruited via word-of-mouth amongst social dancers in the Denver, CO metro area. Recruitment was augmented via social media groups for social dancers and physical or electronic bulletin boards at social dance venues in the Denver metro area.

Once initial interest was expressed by a social dancer, they were provided with a Study Information Sheet detailing the purpose, process, and anticipated time commitment of the study (see Appendix A). The Study Information Sheet also addressed the potential benefits and risks of participation, including their right to withdraw from the study, as well as permission to record their interviews and capture digital photographs or video recordings. Social dancers were invited to ask any clarifying questions to the researcher prior to study enrollment. All participants received a copy of the Study Information document before study participation.

All participants were assigned a fictitious name to protect their confidentiality. The

fictitious names have been stored separately from the study data. All study data was stored securely on a password-locked computer and a password-locked flash drive. Participants were notified that they would be invited to attend a celebratory dance gathering hosted by the researcher upon study completion. If they were unable to or did not wish to attend, they were provided with a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

Procedure

Participants were presented with a basic verbal and written description and definition of ESS at their individual interviews, including the list focused on for this study (See page 61). They were then presented with the following introduction and questions: “I am going to ask you some open-ended questions during this interview. It should take approximately one hour. Please answer as thoroughly and honestly as possible. There are no right answers to these questions. What I am looking for is to understand your thoughts and experiences from your perspective. There is no required length of answer; please share as much or as little as you like. We may skip some questions if you answer no to the previous question. When we are finished with the 11 questions, I will ask you if there is anything else you would like to share. Please remember, that you have been assigned a pseudonym for this study, and no identifying information will be shared in the write-up. I want to remind you that I am audio recording this interview so that I can transcribe and analyze the data. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

Instrumentation and Measurement

Interview Questions

See Appendix E for Interview Questions that were posed to study participants. Interviews were recorded for subsequent data transcription and study. It was

communicated to the social dancer participants that they may later be asked to verify or clarify the researcher's summary of the data they provided, and clarification was sought where needed.

Reliability and Validity of Data Gathered via Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interview studies can have strong validity in the sense that the participants are reporting on their own lived experiences (Anderson, 2010). There is no one more qualified to describe what an individual experiences than the individual themselves. At the same time, it is known both that individuals are often limited in their perceptions of themselves, and that they may not answer interview questions entirely transparently (Anderson, 2010). Narrative qualitative studies are limited both by this reality as well as the small sample size. This has implications for reliability due to potential difficulty in replicating study results as well as for limited transferability of findings. In qualitative research, context is important, and with a small sample size, each participant can strongly influence findings. Rigor can be more difficult to adhere to and demonstrate in qualitative studies than it is in quantitative studies. This may, in part, be related to the researcher. The researcher themselves can be a strong influencing factor in qualitative research, particularly if they are not experienced (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Between work style and interpersonal factors, the researcher as a person may inadvertently impact the study outcomes. Finally, qualitative, narrative, and content analysis studies can be time-consuming due to the amount of data gathered that needs to be transcribed, coded, and analyzed. There are both pros and cons to qualitative research methods. In this study, the qualitative, narrative content analysis research method offered a nuanced and complex way to capture subjects' lived experiences, making it the method of choice for this study.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the social dancer participant interviews were transcribed and then imported to Quirkos to aid in coding and analysis. First, the researcher obtained transcripts of each interview which were then read and visually analyzed. Initial keywords and themes were assigned codes. Coding was expanded upon as themes and notable points emerged during ongoing analysis. Microsoft Excel was also utilized to analyze the obtained data, and multiple checks and rechecks were conducted for congruency between the data coding in Quirkos and Microsoft Excel. When questions arose as to the accuracy of the data captured, the researcher requested a follow-up with the social dancer participant who was asked to review and clarify the content. After data from all participants had been coded and analyzed, it was then re-analyzed as necessary for study rigor.

Final results have been reported in narrative and content analysis form, including key concepts and themes. Where appropriate, visual graphics have been used to present findings in concise form alongside written results of the analysis.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

Boundaries set in this study relate to both participants and the data collected. Participant delimitations included parameters set in the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of note, as relates to the data analysis, are the minimum requirements regarding length of employment ever and length of current employment. This was because inexperienced employees may not have had sufficient time to develop, or become self-aware about, their ESS.

The number of dance lessons taken, length of time, and frequency of participation in

SD was also a delimitation intended to help ensure that the social dancer participants possess at least intermediate-level SD skills. Additionally, being more skilled in SD may have facilitated the social dancer participants' ability to reflect on their SD skills and how these may, or may not, relate to their ESS.

A delimitation was also set on the number of ESS options presented to all participants. This was due to both the broad number of ESS and the lack of one defined list of ESS in scholarly literature. Without this delimitation, it would have been nearly impossible to gather sufficient data for saturation. Accordingly, the ESS presented to the participants were limited to the 10 that were included in the information sheet provided to participants prior to beginning their interviews or filling out their surveys.

Additionally, some SD skills have a more plausible relationship to ESS. It is not realistic that the entire spectrum of ESS would have a relationship to SD skills, nor is it realistic to address an overwhelming number of ESS in this study. The 10 chosen ESS of focus for this study can be seen in Figure 4. They are as follows; teamwork, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, interpersonal, empathy, learning, adaptability, integrity, and creativity. These 10 were chosen for two reasons. The first was due to findings revealed in the literature review about which ESS are more valued by employers. The second factor influencing the choice of the ESS chosen was the plausibility of their relationship to SD skills.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all participants had the basic knowledge necessary to meaningfully participate and that they would do their reasonable best to respond honestly and accurately. It was also assumed that there would be limits and exceptions to this.

Participants may lack fully accurate self-knowledge, and/or some may feel somehow constrained about what they shared. It was also assumed that the researcher brings their own biases to this study based on their lived experiences and that every attempt to recognize these and avoid allowing them to impact the qualitative interview process would be made.

Limitations

Potential limitations of this study related to the qualitative narrative and content structure of the study included small sample size, convenience-type sampling, and the inherent confines of this type of qualitative study which may limit replicability and transferability (Anderson, 2010; Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). A potential limitation related to the SD participants was the possibility of reluctance to report accurately due to perceptions of social desirability, or some other unidentified reason, which could have impacted the reliability and transferability of results.

Summary

This study was conducted as a qualitative, narrative, and content analysis via individual interviews with skilled social dancer participants. The research question was: How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills to the development of their employee soft skills? Approximately 12 local, social dancers formed the sample. A pre-determined set of 11 open-ended questions was asked to each participant. Recorded responses were transcribed and coded with the aid of Quirkos and Microsoft Excel. The researcher also visually evaluated and cross-evaluated the data. All participants were assigned a fictitious name, and the data protection measures described in this chapter were employed to protect the participants. Findings

are reported in the remainder of this study, and aggregate results have been made available to participants upon request.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine what, if any, the impact of SD skills is on the development of ESS from the lived experience and perspective of social dancers who are in the workforce. Twelve participants, recruited via word of mouth and social media posts, were screened for the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Chapter 3 (see Appendix D). The Social dancers who were included in the sample were interviewed in person and asked a series of open-ended questions designed to explore the research question, “How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills to the development of their employee soft skills?” from the perspective of the participant. Results are presented in this chapter.

Descriptive Results

All participants satisfied the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. All were experienced social dancers between the ages of 20 and 70. The majority of the participants were in their 40s and 50s. Notably, only one participant was under the age of 40. The sample was comprised of seven females and five males, from a wide range of professions from the medical sector to cosmetology. Several participants had made previous changes in their career and industry focus due to shifts in interests, life stage, and personal needs.

With the possible exception of one participant, most of the other participants know each other on some level. These familiarities have developed through encounters in dance venues, and some of the participants have a level of friendship with each other that has been developed through SD. This was not discussed with any of the participants due

to the parameters of confidentiality, rather it was known to the researcher observationally. While this is a pro-social benefit of SD, this particular byproduct of the convenience sampling has been a very limited ability to include biographical details about participants in this discussion, due to an increased need to safeguard confidentiality.

This was not a component of inclusion criteria but, circumstantially, all participants were college educated at the minimum and held the highest terminal degree in their profession at the maximum. All participants identified with traditional male lead and female follow roles in social dance, although several were also skilled in the complementary role, making them “ambidextrous” in social dance, able to either lead or follow to varying degrees of skill. All participants expressed a belief that their SD skills have impacted the development of their ESS to varying degrees.

Study Findings

The study question, “How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills to the development of their employee soft skills?” was explored utilizing semi-structured, in-person interviews with 12 participants who met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix E for interview questions). Two practice interviews were conducted to assess comprehension of the questions presented, interview flow, participant experience, the time frame needed to complete the interviews, and the suitability of equipment and platforms. Minor adjustments were made to the interview process based on input from the pilots and subsequent early interviews. All original question content was retained, while the format was adjusted to provide a more natural flow for participant responses.

Interviews were audio recorded with an MP3 device. Some participants made

additional comments, ranging from minor to extensive, once the recorder was turned off. In the case of notable post-interview comments, manual notes were made for potential inclusion in the analysis. All of the recordings were of sufficient sound quality to obtain accurate transcripts.

Following transcription of the audio-recorded interviews, the transcripts were printed, read, and uploaded to Quirkos to assist in organizing and coding the data. Initial codes were predetermined based on the content presented to the participants and the questions asked. Additional codes were identified and utilized during the analysis process, as themes and notable data emerged. After the initial coding process in Quirkos, the data was manually entered into Excel to double-check the original coding and to further analyze participant responses.

Initial codes were pre-determined based on the 10 referenced ESS presented to the participants and the specific interview questions. The first codes were taken from the top 10 list of referenced ESS contained in Table 3: Teamwork, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Communication, Interpersonal, Empathy, Learning, Adaptability, Integrity, and Creativity. Initial Codes assigned related to the interview questions were: Highly Developed ESS, Moderately Developed ESS, Under Developed ESS, Most Important to Career Success, Most Important to Organization/Employer Success, ESS Used in SD, ESS that Carry Over Into Work, and ESS Developed in SD. Additional codes that emerged during analysis based on themes that became apparent in participant responses were: All of Them, Combinations, Skill vs. Motivation, Additional Benefits of SD, Notes on Integrity, Gender Differences, and Additional Thoughts. The Code Book used for analysis is presented below.

Top 10 ESS Referenced

Adaptability: The ability to flex and change in response to changing circumstances

Communication: Verbal and nonverbal communication with individuals or groups

Creativity: The use of imagination to accomplish a desired outcome

Decision Making: The ability to make timely, informed decisions

Empathy: The ability to put oneself in the shoes of another/to understand the feelings of others

Integrity: Honesty, moral uprightness, soundness

Interpersonal: The ability to successfully engage with others

Learning: The ability (including desire) to acquire, process, and integrate new ideas or skills

Problem Solving: The ability to see a problem and come up with an effective solution

Teamwork: The ability to work synergistically with others to achieve a desired outcome

General Codes

Most important to employment success: The ESS that participants expressed as being the most important to success in their job role

Most important to the success of organization/employer: The ESS participants believe are most important to the success of their organization or employer

Crossover: ESS that participants use in SD that they believe crosses over into their work life

ESS Developed in SD: The ESS that participants believe SD has helped them develop or hone

Strongest ESS Possessed: The ESS participants believed are well-developed in themselves

Medium ESS Possessed: The ESS participants felt they possessed at moderate levels

Lowest ESS Possessed: The ESS participants believed they were lowest in

Emergent Codes

All of the Above: Participants indicated they possess all of the 10 referenced ESS

Notes on Integrity: Noting unexpected, sometimes disparate, mentions of integrity

Additional Thoughts: Notable, interesting points mentioned by participants

Groupings: Participants expressed belief that one or more ESS were grouped, part of, or dependent on one or more additional ESS

Additional Benefits of SD: Thoughts participants shared about the benefits of SD in addition to crossover into the workplace or the development of ESS in SD,

All of Them

11 of the 12 participants stated that they believed they possessed all of the 10 ESS referenced, informing one of the earliest themes to emerge, “All of Them.” Allie said, “I like to think that I possess them all. If I was missing one, I think it would show. I would have difficulty in what I’m doing.” The other participant said they believed they possessed “a lot of them”, but then went on to identify each of the 10 ESS as one they possess. No participant identified themselves as entirely lacking a particular ESS out of the 10 presented. All participants ultimately expressed that they possess all of the 10 presented ESS.

Combinations of ESS

Several participants indicated that certain ESS were associated with, or dependent on

each other, rather than a stand-alone skill. For example, both Pearl and Xavier expressed that teamwork and communication are intertwined. Xavier shared his experience, saying “...if you have good communication, then you’ll have good teamwork. And, I think they are dependent, they’re not mutually exclusive. With teamwork, I was on multiple different teams, almost dancing every day with different teams, and it did help me to understand the dynamics. But like I said, it’s interwoven with communication.” Anthony saw this phenomenon more globally with the 10 referenced ESS, “They kind of all, they all overlap at some point.” Nine of the 10 referenced ESS were mentioned as being part of an ESS combination. The ESS mentioned most frequently as being tied to one, or more, other ESS were Communication, (N=4), Problem Solving, (N=4), Empathy, (N=3), Teamwork, (N=3), and Creativity, (N=3). Two specific combinations were mentioned by more than one participant. The first was Creativity and Problem Solving (N=3), and the second was Communication and Teamwork, (N=2). The only ESS that was not mentioned as being tied to another was Decision Making.

Skill vs. Motivation

Four participants spoke about ESS they possess but are not always inclined to use. For example, regarding Adaptability, Jonathan said, “I can be really adaptable on changing how I do things and just restructuring how I work altogether. But then if I’m kind of waylaid with, ‘Hey, I think you should do this.’ and I’m like, ‘I like the way I do things.’ I might kind of become like, ‘I am the ram and this is my mountain, get off my mountain.’” Similarly, concerning Communication and a difference between skill and desire to utilize it, Shari commented, “Communication – [it’s] not something I want to do in all situations, so I would say again that skill and playing ball are different.”

Additional Benefits of Dance

Several participants mentioned work-related benefits from SD that were not specific to ESS. Jonathan in particular believes that SD has shaped not only his career success but his career trajectory. “I got an internship through someone I met through dancing. That internship was computer programming. And then he and I, and another person, we formed a company together, and that was a graphic design and programming firm. And then through that, I met another person. He played bass, and he told me about a job opening at his work. And through that, I met one of my long-term friends. He was my boss at the time, and he’s connecting me to so many opportunities, including my current job. It’s been 26 years now of a professional career that the seeds of which were grown and watered in the dance community. And I’m so incredibly grateful and feel so lucky because of that.” Other participants mentioned the value of feeling rejuvenated by dance, or having a growth mindset, which in turn allows them to be better, and better use their ESS, in their work roles.

Notes on Integrity

Interestingly, Integrity emerged as the single ESS that participants expressed the most disparate experiences of and beliefs about. Several participants said that Integrity was of top importance to their own career success as well as the success of their organization or employer. They rated Integrity as one of their most highly developed ESS, and they expressed sentiments like, “Integrity is everything.” A couple of other participants said they “struggle with integrity.” Those on that side of the Integrity spectrum listed Integrity as less developed in themselves, and they also expressed that they have a harder time seeing how Integrity is used in SD.

Well Developed ESS

Participants were asked to describe how well developed each of the ESS they said they possessed is at this point. In contrast to the question about which, if any, of the 10 referenced ESS participants possess, responses were much more varied to this question, as well as to the remaining questions. Between the 12 participants, each of the 10 ESS was rated as highly developed by at least eight participants. This indicates that the majority of the participants think the majority of their ESS are well developed. Adaptability, Learning, and Problem Solving were each rated as well developed by 11 of the 12 participants, making them the three most highly developed ESS of the group.

Mike stated, “Problem Solving would be one of my stronger, most exceptional skills. I love finding a problem and just sitting and like, ‘How do I fix this?’” The remaining seven listed ESS were each rated as highly developed by eight of the participants. Lori was enthusiastic about Learning, as were multiple other participants. She stated, “I love, love learning you know, from any new experience, or even an older experience.”

Table 4

Employee Soft Skills Participants Described as Well Developed

Skills			
Teamwork	8	Empathy	8
Problem Solving	11	Learning	11
Decision Making	4	Adaptability	11
Communication	8	Integrity	9
Interpersonal	8	Creativity	8

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

Moderately Developed ESS

Creativity and Decision Making were the two of the 10 ESS most frequently rated as being moderately developed, with four of the seven rating Creativity as moderately developed (N=4), and three of the seven ranking Decision Making (N=3) and Empathy (N=3) as moderately developed (N=3). The remaining ESS were all rated as moderately developed by two or fewer participants. No strong trends were observed.

Table 5

Employee Soft Skills Participants Described as Moderately Developed

Skills			
Teamwork	2	Empathy	3
Problem Solving	1	Learning	1
Decision Making	3	Adaptability	1
Communication	4	Integrity	2
Interpersonal	2	Creativity	4

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

Underdeveloped ESS

Only two participants rated themselves as underdeveloped in an ESS. One male participant rated himself as low in Empathy, and one female participant rated herself as low in Decision Making. The trend in this category is seen by the absence of ESS participants identified as underdeveloped.

Table 6*Employee Soft Skills Participants Described as Underdeveloped*

Skills			
Teamwork	0	Empathy	1
Problem Solving	1	Learning	0
Decision Making	0	Adaptability	0
Communication	0	Integrity	0
Interpersonal	0	Creativity	0

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

ESS Most (and least) Important to Job Success

Problem Solving was rated as the most needed ESS for personal success in the participant's own careers or jobs, with 12 out of 12 participants indicating it was important. Jonathan explained, "...I think Problem Solving. Again, in a teaching environment for my work, when something doesn't work for a student, and they're like, 'I don't get it, help!', you can't attack that from the same angle every time, with every person. Everyone is so different and so unique on how they think, how they process information. It's so different. And so, having the problem-solving skills to be like, 'Try this. Have you done this?'"

The close second to Problem Solving was Communication, with 11 of the 12 participants indicating that it is one of the most important ESS for their own success. Anthony said, "Communication is probably at the top of the list for being important to my work." There were two ESS that only two participants indicated were among the most important for their success, Interpersonal and Creativity.

Table 7*Employee Soft Skills Most Important to Personal Job Success*

Skills			
Teamwork	5	Empathy	6
Problem Solving	12	Learning	4
Decision Making	6	Adaptability	6
Communication	11	Integrity	5
Interpersonal	2	Creativity	2

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

ESS Most Important to Employer/Organization Success

The two ESS participants ranked as most important to the success of their organization or employer were Problem Solving (11/12) and Communication (11/12). It is salient to note that Problem Solving and Communication were ranked as most highly needed for success both individually and for participant's employing organizations as well. While looking over the referenced list of ESS, Mike Commented, "I think, I mean, they're all important. All 10 of these are really good, and it's kind of if I were to talk about all 10, then everything's special, nothing's special." He went on to identify Communication and Problem Solving to be ranked highest in this category. Referring to Problem Solving and Communication on the list of 10 referenced ESS, Shari summarized this succinctly, "Both of them, and I put communication first and problem-solving second." The ESS

that were least mentioned in response to this question were Creativity and Interpersonal with both only being indicated by two of the 12 participants as ranked highly important.

Table 8

Employee Soft Skills Most Important to the Success of Organization or Employer

Skills			
Teamwork	7	Empathy	5
Problem Solving	10	Learning	3
Decision Making	4	Adaptability	8
Communication	10	Integrity	8
Interpersonal	3	Creativity	2

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

ESS Used in SD

All participants believe they use several or many ESS in their social dancing.

Anthony, after addressing each of the 10 ESS by name as relates to SD, stated, “I would say that all these things play a role in social dance.” Jonathan said a similar thing when asked which, if any of the 10 ESS he uses in SD, “I think all of them to some degree.” Mike echoed that with some further explanation, “All of them have their place.” “So, it’s funny, when I look at this list, and I think of social dancing, my brain goes, ‘Which style of social dance?’... If I’m doing country, I feel like the importance of some of these skills is higher. And, if I’m doing West Coast Swing or even Argentine Tango, that shifts greatly.”

The highest ranked ESS in this category were as follows; Teamwork, (N=10/12), Empathy, (N=9/12), Learning, (N=9/12), Adaptability, (N=8/12) Communication,

(N=8/12), Creativity, (N=8/12), Interpersonal, (N=8/12), and The ESS least mentioned in this category were Integrity, (N=6/12), Problem Solving, (N=6/12), and Decision Making, (N=5/12). As a whole, all participants indicated that they use more than half of the 10 referenced ESS in their social dancing.

Table 9

Employee Soft Skills Participants Use in Social Dance

Skills			
Teamwork	10	Empathy	9
Problem Solving	6	Learning	8
Decision Making	6	Adaptability	9
Communication	8	Integrity	6
Interpersonal	8	Creativity	8

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

ESS that Crossover from SD to the Workplace

All participants expressed that they believe between three and 10 of the 10 referenced ESS cross over from SD to the workplace in some way. Luis was the most reserved in his perception of this, seeing crossover as an unconscious process. He said, “I don’t know that I’m making a connection to them translating into work, I’m probably building the muscle, but at least not in a conscious way.” In his later comments on this, he further explained, “I guess I have a tendency to keep the world separated.” On the other side of the spectrum, Jonathan indicated his overall belief that the referenced ESS crossover from SD to the workplace, “Yes, yes. It’s not a one-to-one, you are not going to use them in the same way, but yes it absolutely does.”

Three of the participants expressed belief that all 10 (N=10) of them crossover. Five of the 12 spoke of three or four they found to cross over (N=5). The ESS that were most often believed to cross from dance to work were: Adaptability, (10/12), Teamwork, (10/12), Communication, (9/12), Interpersonal, (9/12), Creativity, (8/12), and Learning, (7/12). Amongst those, Adaptability, Creativity, and Teamwork were the most frequently named.

Two participants identified six ESS they believe cross over from dance to work (N=6). It is interesting to note that these two participants identified the exact same six ESS: Adaptability, Communication, Empathy, Interpersonal, Learning, and Teamwork. It is also interesting, although perhaps coincidental, that this corresponds with the average number of ESS participants believe crossover from dance to work was 6.25 (N=6.25).

Table 10

Employee Soft Skills that Participants Find Cross Over from SD into the Workplace

Skills			
Teamwork	10	Empathy	9
Problem Solving	5	Learning	7
Decision Making	5	Adaptability	10
Communication	9	Integrity	3
Interpersonal	9	Creativity	8

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

ESS Developed in SD

All participants indicated that they believe social dancing has helped to develop their ESS. Mike's emphatic response to the interview questions, "Do you think that social

dance has helped you to develop or hone any of these skills (the 10 referenced ESS)?” was, “I don’t believe it, I know it!”. The number of ESS individual participants indicated that SD has helped them hone varied from three to 10. Teamwork and Creativity emerged as the top two ESS developed in SD as determined by nine out of 12 participants. The ESS the least number of participants mentioned in this category were Decision Making and Integrity, with only 4 participants indicating that SD has helped them hone these skills. There was no ESS of the 10 referenced that were not mentioned as assisting in honing the participants’ ESS. See Table 4 for rankings.

Table 11

Employee Soft Skills that SD Has Helped Participants Develop

Skills			
Teamwork	9	Empathy	8
Problem Solving	5	Learning	8
Decision Making	4	Adaptability	7
Communication	8	Integrity	4
Interpersonal	8	Creativity	9

Note: Number out of 12 participants who identified each ESS

Xavier described his experience of SD aiding in him developing the ESS Interpersonal, “Interpersonal stuff absolutely, I’m a much better communicator now because I learned those interpersonal skills while dancing.” “I always call dance a three-minute relationship, because that’s what it is, and you have to have good interpersonal skills to come out of it feeling good.”

Seven of the 12 participants indicated SD helps develop Adaptability. Explaining this a bit further, Mike said, “As for adaptability, I don’t think there’s anything that challenges you more than dancing to adapt. Every three minutes there’s a new song, a new partner, and potentially a new style of dance, and there are changes within that song. So, the more you keep yourself on your toes in any facet, the more it’s going to help you just be prepared for change or unexpected things.”

Participants indicated that things like exercising a skill that does not come naturally to them and interacting with such a wide variety of people have been helpful for their ESS development. It was mentioned that it is akin to building a muscle; when the muscle is strengthened, it can be used to accomplish different things. Anthony provided this piece of insight on one way he experiences SD helping home his ESS, “I’m going to say all of them again. I think there is a way human beings learn through physical things. And dance is a way to for sure to open up the ability to feel adaptability, rather than just knowing adaptability, and feel problem-solving rather than just knowing problem-solving, and feel and experience visceral empathy for someone, rather than just knowing how to be empathetic.”

Gender Differences and Similarities in ESS Rankings

Two of the five male participants rated themselves as high in all 10 ESS, while none of the seven female participants did. Two female participants were close seconds, ranking themselves as highly developed in nine of the 10 ESS. Adaptability, Learning, and Problem Solving were ranked as the most highly developed ESS by both genders. All five male participants reported Creativity, Decision Making, Learning, and Problem Solving to be highly developed. There was no single ESS that all female participants

ranked as highly developed.

It is interesting to note that while all the male participants ranked Creativity and Decision Making ESS as highly developed, only three of the seven females ranked each of them as such, making them the two ESS identified by male participants as most highly developed, and identified by female participants as amongst the least developed. Alexis said, “Decision-making is not strong, definitely low in the confidence area. I am reluctant to make decisions.” Learning and Problem Solving, along with Adaptability were ranked as highly developed by 11 of the 12 participants, making those the strongest ESS across both genders. Problem Solving was ranked highly by all 12 participants, male and female.

Adaptability was ranked as one of the most important ESS for organizational success by all five male participants, but only three of the seven female participants. All five male participants indicated that they use Creativity in their dancing, while only three of the seven women did. Similarly, three male participants said that SD has helped them develop their Decision Making, while only one female participant did. On the flip side, three of the male participants said that SD has helped them develop the ESS Teamwork, while six of the seven female participants did.

Additional Thoughts

Participants made some interesting and notable comments that did not fall neatly into another category. These comments were varied, and while no strongly thematic content emerged from them, it is worth noting some of them. For example, in reference to Mike’s comment seen on page 69 about the style of SD influencing which ESS are used was echoed by Claire, who also thought the style of SD may influence which ESS are used.

On another note, Alexis spoke about a difference in stance towards taking direction as she does in SD and work than in other domains of her life. “I’m not a naturally subservient person. I am naturally really objectionable and resentful of being told what to do. And yet, I am 100% a follow. I am not a lead. I can’t do it. I don’t even want to. Dance is one area of my life where I am willing to submit to someone else’s directions. And maybe this is an aha moment for me because I don’t do that in my relationships at all, but I do at work [follow instruction].” This sentiment is reminiscent of some of the comments made by participants that are found under the subheading, Skill vs. Motivation found on page 63, but was more a commentary on a dispositional trait and the impact it can have on her ESS.

Shari introduced a crucial point on the ESS Communication. She said she has sometimes had to communicate a lack of consent while social dancing. This was mentioned by several other participants regarding things such as declining a move they: 1), did not think was safe for them for physical reasons, or 2), that was possibly unsafe with a particular partner due to lack of familiarity with the dancer or not being sure about skill levels to successfully complete the move. Shari’s thoughts about communicating lack of consent had to do with physical, or even sexual boundaries, such as having to say to a dance partner attempting unwanted touch upon concluding a dance, “You don’t have permission to caress my arm.”

Unfortunately, infractions like this sometimes happen in SD. Shari described SD as a “recipe” for boundary crossing. Occasionally, one party initiates a more familiar, or sexualized, touch, and takes advantage of an opportunity to touch their dance partner without consent, beyond what is necessary for the dance. Shari related this to the

importance of the ESS Communication for consent in the workplace as well. While other participants spoke of the importance, and nuances, of both Communication and Integrity, Shari's was a salient mention of the importance of the ESS Communication to convey consent, or lack thereof, for physical touch both on the dancefloor and in the workplace.

Summary of Findings

All 12 participants, (N=12) believe they possess some, or all, of the 10 referenced ESS. Participants ranked most of the ESS as highly developed, and two of them, (N=2) believe they are all highly developed. 10 of the 12 participants, (N=10) indicated that between one and four of the ESS were moderately developed. Only two (N=2) participants believed that they had an (one each) underdeveloped ESS (see Table 12).

Table 12

Comparison: Highly, Moderately, and Underdeveloped ESS

Highly Developed ESS		Moderately Developed ESS		Underdeveloped ESS	
11	Adaptability	4	Communication	1	Decision Making
11	Learning	4	Creativity	1	Empathy
11	Problem Solving	3	Decision Making	0	Adaptability
9	Integrity	3	Empathy	0	Communication
8	Communication	2	Integrity	0	Creativity
8	Creativity	2	Interpersonal	0	Integrity
8	Decision Making	2	Teamwork	0	Interpersonal
8	Empathy	1	Adaptability	0	Learning
8	Interpersonal	1	Learning	0	Problem Solving
8	Teamwork	1	Problem Solving	0	Teamwork

Note: Number of participants who rated each as such

Likewise, all participants, (N=12) believe they use ESS in SD, that some ESS crossover from SD to the workplace, and that SD has helped them develop some, (N=9)

or all, (N=3) of the 10 referenced ESS. See Table 13.

Table 13

Comparative Findings: Most Important to Career Success vs. Organizational Success

Most Important to Career Success		Most Important to Org. Success	
12	Problem Solving	10	Communication
11	Communication	10	Problem Solving
6	Adaptability	8	Adaptability
6	Decision Making	8	Integrity
6	Empathy	7	Teamwork
5	Integrity	5	Empathy
5	Teamwork	4	Decision Making
4	Learning	3	Interpersonal
2	Creativity	3	Learning
2	Interpersonal	2	Creativity

Note: Number of participants that ranked the ESS in each category as indicated

Teamwork and Adaptability were the two ESS that participants most frequently indicated they both use in SD and that crossover from SD to the workplace. Teamwork was also identified as one of the two ESS that was most frequently identified as being developed in SD, (N=9). Taking the place of Teamwork in the top two ranking off ESS Developed in SD, is Creativity, (N=9). The ESS closely following the top two in frequency for use in SD and crossover into the workplace were Communication, Empathy, Learning, Creativity, and Creativity. The frequencies of these selections fairly closely mirror those following the top two in ESS Developed in SD as well. The bottom three across all three categories were Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Integrity (see Table 14).

Table 14

 Comparative Findings: ESS Used in SD, ESS Crossover, and ESS Developed in SD

ESS Used in SD	ESS Crossover	ESS Developed in SD
10 Teamwork	10 Adaptability	9 Creativity
9 Adaptability	10 Teamwork	9 Teamwork
9 Empathy	9 Communication	8 Communication
8 Communication	9 Empathy	8 Empathy
8 Creativity	9 Interpersonal	8 Interpersonal
8 Interpersonal	8 Creativity	8 Learning
8 Learning	7 Learning	7 Adaptability
6 Decision Making	5 Decision Making	5 Problem Solving
6 Integrity	5 Problem Solving	4 Decision Making
6 Problem Solving	3 Integrity	4 Integrity

Note: Number of participants who indicated the ESS that belong in that category

In summary, participants identified their possession and level of development of each of the 10 referenced ESS. They then identified which ESS were most important to their own career success and the success of their organization or employer. In the final portion of the interviews, participants talked about which ESS they use in SD, which they believe have crossover to their work, and which they have developed in SD.

Findings revealed that all participants believe they have strongly developed ESS, some indicated they have moderately developed ESS, and two believe they each have one ESS that is underdeveloped. A fairly high level of correlation was seen between the ESS participants believe are the most important to their own career success and the success of their employer or organization. Finally, data drawn from participant interviews indicates a strong degree of correlation between the ESS they use in SD, those they believe have crossover from SD to the workplace, and those they believe SD has helped them develop.

Communication and Adaptability, in particular, emerged as the two most highly rated and interrelated in regard to being most: highly developed, important for both career and organizational success, used in SD, crossover between SD and work, and developed in SD. Both of these, Communication and Adaptability were ranked by participants as being between first and third place across these categories. The findings of this seminal study can serve to propel the study and practice of the development of ESS in non-work domains, particularly via SD.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the lived experiences and perspectives of social dancers about whether social dancing has positively impacted the development of their ESS or not. Findings reveal that all of the participants believe SD has had an impact on the development of their ESS to varying degrees. Based on data provided by the participants, it is concluded that SD can and does contribute to the development of ESS. This chapter addresses the summary and discussion of findings, implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Eleven of the 12 participants indicated that they possess all of the 10 referenced ESS, with Learning, Problem Solving, and Adaptability ranking as the top three most highly developed ESS amongst the sample. Problem Solving and Communication were believed by the highest number of participants to be important to their own career success and to be most important to the success of their employer or organization.

Teamwork and Adaptability were identified by the most participants as being used in SD and carrying over into their work life. Empathy, Creativity, Communication, and Interpersonal, and Learning were second in these rankings, while Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Integrity followed. The ESS the highest number of participants believed to be developed in their SD were Creativity and Teamwork. These were followed closely by Communication, Interpersonal, Empathy, and Learning. Adaptability was also indicated by more than half the sample.

Three ESS, Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Integrity were believed by less than half of the sample to be developed in their SD. However, a minimum of one-third of participants still believe that they have been developed in their SD. Each of the 10 referenced ESS was identified by at least one-third of participants to have been developed or honed in their social dancing.

Several gender differences were seen in the responses, particularly regarding the number of ESS participants believed are most highly developed in themselves. Amongst the variations noted, the most profound was that three of the five male participants expressed a belief that they are highly developed in all 10 of the referenced ESS, while none of the female participants did. Another significant point, as previously mentioned, is that all male participants indicated that their ESS Creativity, Decision Making, Learning, and Problem Solving are highly developed. This is in contrast to female participants. All female participants rated multiple of the referenced ESS as being highly developed in themselves. However, there was no one ESS of the 10 referenced that was ranked as highly developed by all of the female participants.

It is notable that Communication was identified as one of the two most important ESS for both personal and organizational success, and was also one of the two most referenced ESS identified by participants as being developed in SD. Problem Solving was also identified as one of the two most important ESS for personal and organizational success, but it was amongst the least identified ESS as being developed in SD. More than half of the participants indicated they believe SD has influenced their development of Communication, but less than half of participants said the same of Problem Solving. Alongside this discrepancy, it is salient to note that eight of the 12 participants believe

their Problem Solving ESS to be highly developed, indicating an alignment for perceived Problem Solving needs in the workplace and the participants' ability to meet that specific need. That said, the ESS that participants believe to be most important to the success of their organization or employer were not always the same as the ones they feel they most strongly possess, leaving room for growth. This finding was not mentioned by any participant, rather, it was revealed in the data analysis.

This study was conducted to examine the impact of SD on the development of ESS. However, participants mentioned other benefits of SD as well, such as shaping their career trajectory due to connections made in SD, feeling more rejuvenated and thus freer to function well in their work domain, and participating in an activity that involves a growth mindset. These points emerged during the interviews though they were not in response to specific interview questions.

The findings that most directly and succinctly answer the study question, "How do social dancers perceive and describe the relationship, if any, of their social dance skills to their employee soft skills?" was that all of the participants believed there was some positive impact of SD on the development of their ESS. Creativity, Teamwork, Communication, Empathy, Interpersonal, Learning, and Adaptability were each identified by more than half of the participants as being developed in SD.

Discussion of Findings

Well Developed ESS

All of the participants in this study believe that they are well-developed in most, or all, of the 10 referenced ESS. The reason for this could be multifactorial and some of those potential factors exceeded the scope of this study. Possible explanations include the level

of education of the participants and their age and stage of their career development in addition to the influence of SD on the development of their ESS. Several participants unequivocally claim that SD is responsible for a portion of their ESS development and that some of this impacted them in their early career development. From an outside perspective, the hypothesis that SD is useful in the development of ESS is most likely accurate in regard to Communication and Adaptability, which were ranked in the top three ESS as being highly developed and also ranked highly in the categories of being used in SD, carrying over from SD to work, and being developed in SD.

ESS Are Developed in SD

Communication was ranked in second place and Adaptability was ranked in third place of the ESS participants believe have been developed in their ESS. However, it is possible that these are the two ESS that are most specifically developed, or honed, in SD. This possibility is seen in the data trend described above in the section on Well Developed ESS due to the congruency of reports that these ESS are highly developed in the participants and are used and developed in SD. On the flip side of this trend, Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Integrity were reported by participants to be the three ESS, of the 10 referenced, that are less likely to be developed in SD.

These findings indicate a possibility that SD is best utilized for the development of particular ESS. However, overall findings revealed that participants believe each of the 10 referenced ESS is utilized and developed in SD to varying degrees. Perhaps the most informative finding of this study is that the data indicates that SD is an effective and viable means of ESS development.

Transfer of Life Skills

The theoretical foundation for this study was Pierce et al.'s (2017) Transfer of Life Skills model. In this model, the authors assert that the transfer of life skills from one domain to another is, "The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a personal asset (i.e., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned" (Pierce et al., 2018, p.194). This closely matches participants' perceptions of the development of their ESS in SD and the transfer of those skills to their work domain. In particular, similar to Pierce et al.'s findings, the findings of this study indicate that the transfer of these skills is a dynamic, complex, and ongoing process.

Experiential Learning and ESS Development

All dancers expressed a belief that they develop ESS in SD, which is normally a voluntarily chosen recreational activity. Morris (2020) asserted that there are three elements needed to synthesize Kolb's (2015) Experiential Learning Model. These three elements are as follows: learners must be active participants, the learning content must take place in the context of place and time, and that novel experiences facilitate the learner's ability to take risks in their learning, making the learning more relatable to real-world problems. This perhaps speaks to the ongoing gap in the level of development needed in ESS and the level seen in the workplace. It may also speak to an inefficacy of the current models of developing ESS. Despite the inclusion of ESS training in some school curricula and workplace initiatives, the gap seems to be as wide as ever. This reveals a need for more effective means of developing ESS, and the findings of this study

indicate that SD, as embodied learning, could be utilized to fill a portion of that gap given that SD provides learning in a context that meets Morris' criteria to potentize Kolb's model.

Referring again to Anthony's explanation of this phenomenon on p. 73, the efficacy of SD for this type of experiential learning is seen in his words, "I think there is a way human beings learn through physical things. And dance is a way to for sure to open up the ability to feel adaptability, rather than just knowing adaptability, and feel problem-solving rather than just knowing problem-solving, and feel and experience visceral empathy for someone, rather than just knowing how to be empathetic." Intellectual knowledge of an ESS is very different than experientially being able to utilize it. SD is inherently experiential and helps develop ESS in a synthesized manner rather than just being presented as cognitive facts. This lack of experiential learning may be one of the missing pieces in ESS trainings, contributing to the stubborn persistence of the gap in ESS training and ESS needed in the workplace. Data gathered in this study indicates that developing ESS in SD may help close that gap.

ESS Additional Benefits May Lead to Increased Work Performance

Dance has been shown to increase subjective well-being (mood mental health, physical health, and social connection) which, in turn, has been proven to increase productivity (Vecchi et al., 2022). The experiences of the participants in this study are congruent with Vecchi's findings. Allie spoke of SD as being 'happy' and said that even discussions about dance in the workplace lift the mood. The wellbeing to productivity link is also congruent with participants who said that SD rejuvenates them which allows them to perform better in their work. Another element revealed in the data is that SD

involves a growth mindset that aids in overall performance. A growth mindset is related to the ESS Learning, but there are nuances to a growth mindset that Learning does not entirely capture. These reported additional benefits to SD add perspective to the integrated nature of the benefits of SD related to ESS. In particular, the added benefits of rejuvenation and contributing to a growth mindset may serve to increase the efficacy of ESS.

Gender Differences in Participant Responses

Gender differences in responses to the semi-structured interview questions were observed in the data analysis. This was not a question of interest in the study but solidly emerged as thematic. One of the key differences noted was that two of the five male participants indicated that they are highly developed in the 10 referenced ESS, while none of the seven female participants did. Another noticeable difference in responses between genders was that all male participants believed themselves to be highly developed in Creativity, Decision Making, Learning, and Problem Solving. In contrast, there was no single ESS, of the 10 referenced, that was ranked as highly developed by all female participants.

It is interesting to note that while all the male participants ranked Creativity and Decision Making ESS as highly developed, only three of the seven females ranked each of them as such, making them two ESS identified by male participants as most highly developed, and identified by female participants as amongst the least developed. It is not possible from this study to determine if this difference is related to SD or if it has another origin. Another difference that emerged was a difference in which of the 10 referenced ESS males and females believe SD has helped them develop. Adaptability and Teamwork

were the two ESS that the highest number of female participants identified as being developed in SD. Creativity was believed by all male participants to be developed in SD, followed by Interpersonal, Empathy, Learning, and Communication.

All of the males in this study identified their primary dance role as the lead, and all the female participants, with the exception of one who both follows and leads, identified their dance role as a follow. The difference in skills needed to lead and follow in SD may be reflective of the differences in experiences and perceptions of leaders and followers. It is possible that the gender differences noted in response to some of the interview questions may be more reflective of dance role, rather than gender.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundations for this study rested primarily on three constructs: integrity (wholeness/soundness), skills needed to love well, and dance as both an inherent part of life and as a spiritual practice (Matthew 22:37-40, *New American Standard Bible*; Proverbs 23:7, *New American Standard Bible*; 2 Samuel 6:14, Luke 15:25, *New American Standard Bible*). There were no questions in the semi-structured interviews that specifically addressed these biblical foundations, and participant narratives did not offer significantly greater clarity on them. Consistent though with these as fundamental, but non-specific underpinnings of the study were the participants embodied experiences of SD and the overall congruency they expressed with the value of ESS, the value of SD to them personally, and the impact of SD on the development of their ESS. Kelly et al., 2020 found that seriously pursuing a leisure activity that is significantly different from their work role promotes career sustainability. God created us multifaceted beings, and

the findings of this study are congruent with this link; SD impacts the development of ESS and contributes to cross-domain well-being and ESS utilization.

Implications

The findings of this study robustly indicate that social dancers believe they do develop some, or all, of the 10 referenced ESS in their dancing, and that they believe themselves to have highly developed ESS. First, the findings of this study point to the leisure domain as one in which ESS can be developed and one that can promote embodied learning. More specifically, the data supports the strategic use of SD in ESS development training. This could occur in school curricula and workplace trainings designed to develop ESS, whether through brief, targeted interventions or as a longer-term pursuit. In keeping with choice as a key factor in effective adult learning, it may boost the efficacy of the training if it were offered as an elective learning choice in either environment (Palis & Quiros, 2014). Fortunately, the development of ESS need not be restricted to adult learning. As Mike referred to, having children take SD in school (earlier than college or trade school) may be a helpful means of jumpstarting the development of ESS, even prior to individuals entering occupational training, college, or the workforce.

An additional, and complimentary, use of the study findings could have value in settings beyond the workplace. The origins of this study were an acknowledgment of the reality that ESS are developed and utilized across domains. Likewise, the implications of these study findings need not be restricted entirely to ESS used in the workplace. There may be additional applications such as in developing personal and relational skills. For example, there may be value in incorporating SD into personal formation curricula,

marriage-building workshops, organizational culture building, and community development initiatives, all of which are domains in which soft skills are of high value.

Limitations

Multiple limitations impacted this study, beginning with convenience sampling. All the participants in the sample were taken from the local SD community in the Denver metro and surrounding areas. While there was some ethnic diversity and diversity of previous geographic areas amongst the participants, there was a degree of homogeneity due to the close proximity of the geographic boundaries and the size of the local SD community. This geographic constraint may have limited the diversity of experiences and viewpoints among the participants.

Another limitation that was obvious prior to the start of the study was related to the impact of traits and personality on the development and use of ESS. ESS are conceptualized as skills because they can be developed, whereas traits are more inherent. This limitation came even more to the forefront as several participants talked about the difference between possessing an ESS and the desire to use it, such as is seen in Shari's comment that "skill and playing ball are different." It was beyond the scope of this study to analyze the impact of traits on the referenced ESS.

Other anticipated limitations were due to the seminal nature of this study, with no comparable studies to compare results against, and with no previously extant subject matter experts. The Transfer of Life Skills model that served as the theoretical foundation for this study proved comparable and suitable, as did previous work on experiential learning theories (Kolb, 2015; Morris, 2020; Pierce et al., 2017). However, while helpful foundations, these were still proximations. A limitation that emerged in the data analysis

was the inability to analyze the origins of the variations in gender responses. It is possible that some of them were related to gender, lead or follow dance roles, a combination of both, or neither.

A more subtle limitation of the study was the reality that the interview questions introduced a concept that only a couple of the participants had considered before – the relationship between ESS used in the workplace and ESS used or developed in SD. The participants did not know what the interview questions were before participating in their interview, and they had limited time to think about their responses. Pearl said that the conclusion of her interview, “It’s interesting to ponder and evaluate, and think about how, um, what I do at work could be added into what I’m doing with ballroom. ‘Cause oftentimes, I’ve thought of them as absolutely separate, but I can see, um, that they’re more connected than I’ve pondered previously.” Variations of this sentiment were echoed by other participants at the end of their interviews. Several made comments such as, “I think I’m going to go away and see even more connections now that I’ve started thinking about it.” This lack of runway for thinking about ESS in conjunction with SD may have limited feedback and data collection.

Participants in qualitative studies are considered to be highly reliable sources of data because nobody knows their lived experiences and perceptions better than the participants themselves (Anderson, 2010). However, all humans are susceptible to some lack of clarity about themselves which could have impacted participants' evaluations of how well-developed their ESS are. It is also possible that the skill level of the researcher/interviewer could have impacted data collection in limiting ways.

Recommendations for Future Research

This was the first study to look at the relationship of SD to ESS. The qualitative nature of the study led to the gathering of a revealing and interesting body of data. It also raised further questions and highlighted multiple factors for future investigation. Future quantitative or mixed-methods studies would be of value to examine the statistical significance of the impact of SD on the development of ESS. In a similar vein, it would be helpful to know if experienced social dancers generally have better-developed ESS than non-dancers at a similar stage of life and career, given most of the participants rated the majority of their ESS to be highly developed. This additionally raises questions about how much participation in SD promotes these results and what the feedback loop between SD and the development of ESS is. It would also be valuable to include outside observers, such as supervisors, in future studies, who could weigh in on their perception of participants' ESS to see if there is congruence between the perceptions of the participants and someone familiar with the ESS they utilize in their work domain.

This study has highlighted the reality that possession of ESS and the desire to use them are not always the same thing. This was particularly seen in the responses of participants who described themselves as highly independent. As previously mentioned, ESS are skills rather than traits, but traits may influence the possession and development of ESS. It would be informative to study the impact of personality or character traits on the development and use of ESS, and if SD plays a role in the mix. Another nuance of this may be in the vein of Allen et al.'s (2022) assertion that development is the ability to leverage learning; do traits impact not only the desire but also the ability to leverage learning in the development and use of ESS?

Another topic that emerged for future research is the data differences between males and females. It would be helpful to explore on a larger scale which ESS different genders believe they most strongly possess and why. Another thread to this that merits exploration is the impact of the lead and follow roles on the thoughts and experiences of social dancers as to which ESS they most believe to be developed in SD. An experimental study would be able to elaborate on this and seek to determine if lead or follow roles could be specifically chosen to develop particular ESS. This could help pinpoint which ESS are best developed in SD as a lead, and which are best developed as a follow, and then selectively target the use of the lead and follow roles in formalized SD training utilized to develop ESS. Targeted trainings may have an advantage of efficacy as well as time and financial savings for individuals or organizations.

Finally, an experimental study in which the intervention group participated in SD training designed to increase specific ESS, and the control group did not, could shed more light on how, and to what degree, ESS are developed in SD. If such a study was fruitful, it could then be expanded upon to test nuances, such as if learning to both lead and follow in SD would further aid the development of specific ESS.

Summary

This study provided an opportunity to intimately learn from experienced social dancers about their perceptions of their own ESS development and how SD has impacted that. The majority of the participants expressed their belief that they are well developed in the 10 ESS that were referenced in the interviews and that SD has helped them to develop those skills. Mike's emphatic response to the interview question, "Do you think that social dance has helped you to develop or hone any of these skills?" is worth

repeating, “I would say I don’t believe it, I know it!” Results strongly point to SD as an avenue that can be utilized to develop ESS. Scientists can use these findings as a platform for further and more in-depth exploration of the impact of SD on ESS development.

Practitioners, employers, and educational institutions can use the findings to consider the inclusion of SD in their ESS trainings. Social dancers can use this information to add value to their own pursuits of SD.

This study is perhaps best concluded with Mike’s thought at the end of his interview, “I wish I could have more people do social dancing so that they could improve some of these skills because I don’t feel like enough people dance. And as a result, I think that it’s an avenue of social development that is under-utilized.”

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APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet

Title of the Project: The Impact of Social Dance Skills on the Development of Employee Soft Skills

Principal Investigator: Danielle Patridge, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Psychology, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must meet the following:

1. You must be between the ages of 20 and 70.
2. You must be fluent in English.
3. You must have been employed full-time for at least two years consecutively of the previous five years.
4. You must currently work on-site (vs. remotely) at least 50% of the time.
5. You must have taken at least five social dance (partnered dancing such as; Swing, Lindy Hop, Ballroom, Country, Salsa, etc.) lessons.
6. You must have been social dancing for at least two years.
7. You must participate in social dance at least two times a month on average.
8. You must consider yourself to have at least an intermediate skill level in social dance (not beginner).

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

Why is this Study Being Done?

There is a need for increased employee soft skills for both employee and organizational success. This study is being conducted to see if social dance skills have any impact, or not, on the development of employee soft skills.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an audio recorded interview with the researcher. This interview will take approximately one hour.
2. You may be asked to review the researcher's notes or analysis on the thoughts and themes that you shared during your interview to help make sure the researcher has accurately understood what you shared. If so, this should take less than one hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society may include the expansion of our current understanding of how employee soft skills can be developed outside of work or school, particularly by means of social dance. It may also provide future researchers and practitioners a new foundation to explore for research about social dance and employee soft skills, including other activity-based, non-work-related means of developing employee soft skills.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

Minimal risk, but the possibility of psychological stress exists. The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include being upset if participation in the study brings up any feelings about your employee soft skills, or your social dance skills, that you are uncomfortable with. It is also possible to be uncomfortable transparently answering the study questions. This risk is no greater than discussing dance or work in daily life without study participation.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and a password-locked flash drive. After a minimum of three and maximum of seven years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and password-protected flash drive for a minimum of three and maximum of seven years and will then be erased.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Social Dancer Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. They will be invited to a celebratory dance gathering at a local venue hosted by the researcher upon study completion. If a participant is unable to, or does not wish to, attend the dance gathering upon study completion, they will receive a \$10 gift card to Starbucks.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Danielle Patridge. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at XXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joyce Brady, at XXXX.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT INFORMATION SHEET

A Study on Social Dance Skills and Employee Soft Skills

What:

I am conducting a study for my dissertation in Industrial-Organizational Psychology as a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. *The topic of my research is the impact, if any, of social dance skills on the development of employee soft skills.*

What are Employee Soft Skills?

These are the non-technical, or nontrade-specific, skills that employees possess, such as adaptability, ability to make decisions in a timely manner, empathy, the ability to work well on a team, creativity, etc.

What is Social Dance?

There are many types of social dance. For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on dance styles that have a leader and a follower who use physical contact to navigate dancing together, such as Ballroom Dance, Swing Dance, Blues Dance, and Salsa Dance, etc.

Why:

Employee soft skills are reported to account for the majority (up to 85%) of employee and organizational success. Employers today report that their employees and applicants lack in, or have underdeveloped, soft skills necessary for organizational thriving. Employee soft skills are taught in some academic curricula as well as in workplace settings. However, a deficit remains in this area. Soft skills are used in multiple domains (areas) of life and not confined to the workplace; therefore, they can also be developed in multiple domains of life. This study seeks to explore the skills learned in social dance as a possible means of developing employee soft skills.

Study Participation:

If you are between the ages of 20 and 70, fluent in English, meet the following criteria, and would like more information about the possibility of participating in this study, please contact the researcher at the email below.

Social Dancers:

- *You have taken at least five social dance lessons
- *You have been social dancing for at least two years
- *You social dance on average at least two times per month
- *You have been employed full-time for a minimum of two years out of the last five
- *You work in-person (v.s remotely) at least 50% of the time
- *You are available to be interviewed for one hour in the month of January 2024, and would potentially be available again for approximately one hour to review the researcher's draft of your responses for accuracy between March and April of 2024.

Researcher: Danielle Patridge

APPENDIX C: SOCIAL MEDIA POST



Social Dance Study Participants Wanted for PhD Research!

ATTENTION Social Dancers: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Liberty University. To participate, you must be a social dancer between the ages of 20-70 who has engaged in social dance for at least 2 years, taken at least 5 dance lessons, dance on average two times a month, consider yourself an intermediate dancer, have been employed for at least two of the past five years, and be employed in a position that is at least 50% in-person. Participants will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview and validate their interview transcripts for accuracy, which should take about an hour to complete.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information. An information sheet will be given to you. The information sheet contains more information about my study that may help you decide if you are interested in participating. You will not need to sign this sheet or return it to me unless you wish to do so. Participants will receive an invitation to a dance event, or if preferred, they will be offered a \$10 Starbucks gift card.

APPENDIX D: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for social dancers includes the following:

1. The social dancer has engaged in social dance for at least two years.
2. The social dancer has taken at least five social dance lessons.
3. The social dancer dances on average two times per month or more.
4. The social dancer considers themselves to be at least at an intermediate skill level.
5. The social dancer has been employed for at least two years out of the previous five.
6. The social dancer is currently employed in a position that is at least 50% in-person (rather than remote work).

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria for social dancers includes the following:

1. The social dancer does not meet one or more of the above inclusion criteria.
2. The social dancer is not fluent in spoken and written English.
3. The social dancer is not available to participate in the interview process in the necessary time frame for the study.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When you think about the list of employee soft skills I shared with you, do you think that you possess any of these types of skills? Yes/No If so, which ones?
2. Of the employee soft skills you identified, how well-developed do you think each is for you at this point? (read back to participant the ESS they identified / skip if none identified in question #1)
3. Of the employee soft skills you mentioned that you see in yourself, which, if any, do you think are most important to your success in your job? (read the identified skills back to the participant again if needed / skip if none identified in question #1)
4. Which do you think are most important to your organization's success? (skip if none identified in question #1)
5. Do you think you use any of these skills in your social dance? Yes/No
6. Which ones? (skip if none identified in question #5)
7. If you answered yes to Question #5, do you think that participating in social dance has helped you develop or hone these skills? Yes/No (skip if none identified in question #5)
8. If you answered yes to the last question, how do you see that happening?
9. Are there any of your social dance skills that you believe carry over into your work life? Yes/No
10. If you answered yes to the last question, which ones do you think carry over and what impact does this have on your work?
11. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share before we wrap up

APPENDIX F: DATA SAMPLE

Most Impt Career Success		Most Impt Org. Success		ESS Used in SD		ESS Developed in SD	
12	Problem Solving	10	Communication	10	Teamwork	9	Creativity
11	Communication	10	Problem Solving	9	Adaptability	9	Teamwork
6	Adaptability	8	Adaptability	9	Empathy	8	Communication
6	Decision Making	8	Integrity	8	Communication	8	Empathy
6	Empathy	7	Teamwork	8	Creativity	8	Interpersonal
5	Integrity	5	Empathy	8	Interpersonal	8	Learning
5	Teamwork	4	Decision Making	8	Learning	7	Adaptability
4	Learning	3	Interpersonal	6	Decision Making	5	Problem Solving
2	Creativity	3	Learning	6	Integrity	4	Decision Making
2	Interpersonal	2	Creativity	6	Problem Solving	4	Integrity

Highly Developed ESS		Moderately Developed ESS		Underdeveloped ESS		ESS Crossover	
11	Adaptability	4	Communication	1	Decision Making	10	Adaptability
11	Learning	4	Creativity	1	Empathy	10	Teamwork
11	Problem Solving	3	Decision Making	0	Adaptability	9	Communication
9	Integrity	3	Empathy	0	Communication	9	Empathy
8	Communication	2	Integrity	0	Creativity	9	Interpersonal
8	Creativity	2	Interpersonal	0	Integrity	8	Creativity
8	Decision Making	2	Teamwork	0	Interpersonal	7	Learning
8	Empathy	1	Adaptability	0	Learning	5	Decision Making
8	Interpersonal	1	Learning	0	Problem Solving	5	Problem Solving
8	Teamwork	1	Problem Solving	0	Teamwork	3	Integrity

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SAMPLE

[Speaker 2] (11:12 - 11:34)

Okay. Okay. So, and you've answered this a little bit already, but I'm going to ask the question and give you an opportunity to respond further if you want to.

Do you think that participating in social dance has helped you hone or develop any of these skills? And if so, which ones?

[Speaker 1] (11:38 - 11:44)

Yeah, I'm just looking to see if it's all of them again. Sorry if I keep saying all of them. That might not help.

[Speaker 2] (11:44 - 11:54)

Nope, I just, I want to, all I want is to know what your experience and your perceptions are. That's what I'm after, so.

[Speaker 1] (11:57 - 12:32)

Yeah, I'm going to say all of them again. I do think that there's a way that the body, I think there's a way that human being learns through physical things. And dance is for sure a way to open up the ability to feel adaptability rather than just know adaptability and feel problem solving rather than just know problem solving and feel empathy for somebody.

And experience visceral empathy for somebody rather than just understanding how to be empathetic.

[Speaker 2] (12:33 - 12:33)

Right.

[Speaker 1] (12:34 - 12:58)

And anytime people can put those lessons into their body tactfully, not tactful, tactilely. I think that that's, I don't know, deeper.

But it's another form of learning that embeds things in different ways than mental learning or heart learning or intuitional learning.