

Effects of training and motivation practices on teamwork improvement and task efficiency: The case of construction firms

Amin Akhavan Tabassi*, Mahyuddin Ramli, Abu Hassan Abu Bakar

School of Housing, Building and Planning, University Science Malaysia (USM), 11800-Penang, Malaysia

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Abstract

A well-organised human resource development programme is a critical strategy for construction companies, as in the coming years, human capital will increasingly play a significant role in organisational success. Based on a combination of the literature appraisal and questionnaire survey, the study explores the correlation of HRD strategies in employee training and motivation practices with teamwork improvement and task efficiency in construction projects. The research analysis was completed on a sample population of 107 individuals within nominated construction firms in Iran. The analysis methods in this research were mainly descriptive and regression-based analyses and the type of investigation was a correlational study. The research found the relationship of training and motivation practices with teamwork improvement and task efficiency in the respondents' companies by exploring the two generated research models.

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1. Introduction

Having a well-organised and effective human resource development (HRD) programme is one of the most important assets of a company, directly impacting its fruitfulness and long-term viability as a company (Chen et al., 2003). The importance of involving human resources (HRs) in development, planning and implementation of competency-based strategies has been emphasised by a number of researchers (Beatty and Schneier, 1997; Buyens et al., 2001; Iatagana et al., 2010). The dynamic external environments, within which many businesses currently operate, require that they develop a capacity for training and learning faster than competitors. In regard to this, Buyens et al. (2001) proposed that HRs are becoming the most important asset of an organisation if they are adequately nurtured, educated and developed. Garavan et al. (2002) suggested that companies should find solutions to novel and complex problems and to enhance the quantity of what they

do through effective training and motivation in HRD practices. In another study, Garavan (1997) considered training, motivation and development of employees at all levels within organisations as vital components in maintaining competitiveness in the international arena. Armstrong and Baron (2002) and Sambrook (2004) state that HRD is concerned with the provision of learning and development opportunities in order to support achievement of business strategies and improvement of organisational, team and individual performance. Consequently, effective training and development practices next to the employees' motivation for training in HRD strategies can make impacts on companies' project performances. Accordingly, training and motivation in HRD practices and their influences on performance of construction projects formed the main core threads of this research.

2. Background of human resource development theory

Since the emergence of the term "HRD", it has been widely used in various fields of studies on organisational structure and effectiveness (Huemann, 2010; Slotte et al., 2004). This has

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60 174709240; fax: +60 46576523.

E-mail addresses: akhavan.ta@gmail.com (A.A. Tabassi), mahyudin@usm.my (M. Ramli), abhassan@usm.my (A.H.A. Bakar).

also, however, created a great deal of perplexity amongst different individuals, organisations and practitioners, as to its meaning. For instance, Nadler and Nadler (1989) defined the term HRD as referring to “managed learning experiences provided by the employer, in a specified period for improving and increasing job performance and providing growth for individuals.” Garavan (1991) defined HRD as the strategic management of training development and management of professional education interventions aimed at facilitating the achievement of organisational goals, whilst at the same time ensuring the full utilisation of the knowledge and skills of employees.

The number of critical surveys, analyses and developments of the theories in HRD has been limited in the past two decades. Nevertheless, the area of HRD knowledge is still considered as a science with relatively formless and permeable boundaries (Garavan and Morley, 2006). Since the inception of the term HRD emerged (attributed to Nadler in the early 1970s), at least two major approaches have been developed with regard to actualizing HRD in organisational theory (Simmonds and Pedersen, 2006). On one side, the British researchers have followed a learning and development paradigm, which has concentrated on strengthened training and development issues (Garavan et al., 1999; McGoldrick et al., 2002). On the other, the American researchers have emphasised performance outcome paradigms, which have concentrated on developing employees to enhance and improve organisational performance (Sambrook, 2004; Swanson and Holton, 2001). Much of the American approach emerged through organisational development theory and there has been an emphasis on coaching, mentoring and leadership development (DeSimone et al., 2002; Simmonds and Pedersen, 2006). Though earlier definitions of HRD put more emphasis on individual rather than organisational learning (Nadler and Nadler, 1970), by the late 1980s, HRD was observed as a much broader notion based on organisational performance and capability in American studies (Sambrook, 2004; Swanson and Holton, 2001). In the late 1980s, the American Society for Training Development defined HRD as a process of enhancing the ability of the HR through development, and a process of adding value to individuals, teams or an organisation as a human system (McLagan, 1989 cited in Wan, 2007). In this definition, HRD is concerned with the capacities of individuals not only with their work skills but also with the benefit that the overall organisation derived from development. Hence, Lengrick-Hall and Lengrick-Hall (1988) observed that most studies in the US literature have tended to focus on performance in HRD discipline. Sambrook (2004) by synthesising US definitions posits that HRD is a process concerned with developing human expertise for the purposes of improving performance. A minority of US contributors (Swanson and Holton, 2001) and the generality of European academics focused on training as the primary purpose of HRD (Garavan et al., 2000; Kilcourse, 1996). Some UK commentators, however, focus on performance in HRD discipline (Kerr and McDoughall, 1999). In addition, the learning perspective asserts that HRD is responsible for training work-related learning capacity at an individual, group and organisational

level. The learning school tends to explain the role of HRD, as one concerned with the enhancement of an individual’s capacity to learn. Accordingly, the two core threads of HRD, which have been emphasised by practitioners, are training and performance (Sambrook, 2004; Stavrou et al., 2007; Swanson, 1996). As a result, due to the nature of this research which evaluates the implementation of training and motivation in HRD practices as well as the performance of the respondent projects, it is therefore, observed that the definitions of HRD by Armstrong and Baron (2002) and Sambrook (2004) are more comprehensive. They state that HRD is concerned with the provision of learning and development opportunities that support the achievement of business strategies and improvement of organisational, team and individual performance.

2.1. HRD in construction organisations

The construction industry is considered to be one of the most dynamic and complex industrial environments (Loosemore et al., 2003; Wild, 2002). It is a “project-based” industry within which individual projects are usually built to client needs and specifications (Bresnen, 1990; Loosemore et al., 2003). A key feature of the industry is that the final product and/or service is not transportable and must be built at the point of its usage (Fellows et al., 2002). Furthermore, the working life of the industry mostly forms project teams with critical and necessary degrees of independent operation for any new project that is committed (Raiden and Dainty, 2006). The impact of this is particularly apparent within the large construction companies (Druker and White, 1995). Moreover, many researchers have stressed on the external sources of workforces and subcontractors in the industry (Debrah and Ofori, 1997; Loosemore et al., 2003). Whilst the increasing use of external sources of workforces and subcontractors have allowed the main contractors to reduce the managing risks and attain better flexibility (Druker and White, 1995), it has also made the management of projects more complex, with a requirement for highly skilled and experienced HR managerial and developmental practices (Fellows et al., 2002; Loosemore et al., 2003). Despite these challenging characteristics of the industry, research on HRD within large construction firms seems not enough and more data is needed (Raiden et al., 2001; Raiden and Dainty, 2006; Tabassi and Bakar, 2009). For instance, Raiden et al. (2001) investigated the central issues of HRD via reflective evaluation of current practices within large construction organisations. They found much data to suggest, in contrast with the past researches, that companies, by demonstrating high commitment on strategic HRD practices received more benefits on staff retention and improved organisational performance. In addition, Beardwell and Holden (1997) asserted that the development of employees and their qualities must be rooted in HRD practices of the companies. Nevertheless, the dynamic and fast-changing organisational, project and skill requirements of the industry present a challenging environment for the effective management and development of human resources. On the other hand, many researchers have seen the industry as a project-based environment (Chinowsky and Meredith, 2000; Clough et al.,

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