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Organizational culture and development: Testing the structural path of factors affecting employees' work performance in an organization

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ABSTRACT

In the world of business skills training, employees' skills can be generally divided into two main categories: hard skills and soft skills. For organization to wax stronger and competitive in the business environment today, employees need to possess soft skills in addition to hard skills. The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to examine the direct influence of both training methodology and trainers' effectiveness on soft skills acquisition, followed by identifying soft skill competencies and their influence on employees' work performance. The study was designed to use a survey research method in studying the effects of soft skills on employee work performance. The units of analysis were the selected managers and executives of a few Malaysian-based companies. Random sampling procedures were carried out in 10 different Malaysian companies, which consisted of about 1200 soft skills trainees, from which 260 participants were selected. The findings revealed that the model of trainer effectiveness and training methodology factors have provided a reasonable explanation for the influence of soft skill acquisition which is the latent variables. The model also revealed that soft skill acquisition positively influenced employees' work performance. The authors recommend need for employers to restructure the methodology for training employees on soft-skills. It is also recommend that, corporate institutions need to adopt 'time-spaced learning' training method in order to circumvent the hindrances associated with training transfer.

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1. Introduction

One of the major challenges for leaders and administrators is the issue of managing human resources for achieving the company specified goals. Hence, an individual leader or administrator cannot solely implement institutional responsibilities and reach the desired outcomes without the cooperation of other human beings. Working with people in an organization is an imperative for a leader or administrator. As a result, leadership requires specialized skills, which could aid and enhance interpersonal relationships with other people. In order to achieve skills like interpersonal relationship among employees in organization, it is important to

have an avenue for leadership and soft skills traits to be inculcated in the potential leader of any community. In line with this idea, the Malaysian government is making tireless efforts to imbibe soft skills and leadership traits in its stakeholders for national growth and development. The present write-up aims to highlight the efforts of the government in imbibing these leadership and soft skills, as well as identify the leadership and soft skills required for building the Malaysian nation.

2. Purpose of the study

Many organizations are now slowly realizing the importance of soft skill development for their workers. They have started investing heavily in the training and development of their workers in order to develop their critical skills, attitude/behavior, and knowledge and to change their existing organizational culture to a higher work performance culture. The purposes of the research are to first, examine the impact of training methodology and trainers' effectiveness on soft skills training, and second, investigate the

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effect of soft skills acquisition on employees' work performance.

3. Literature review

Many scholars have explained the concept of leadership from a number of perspectives. In turn, a wide variety of traditional paradigms and theories all purport to describe and define leadership (Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, & Yammarino, 2013). However, the key message from the definitions and the paradigms is that leadership is generally described as an interpersonal process in which a leader influences followers (Dansereau et al., 2013). For instance, Yukl (2006) defined leadership as 'a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization'. In most definitions, the basic elements of leadership include a leader, a follower, and their relational interactions. The major issue in leadership is how a leader can influence the followers efficiently through relational interactions in order to achieve the stated goals of the institution. From this definition, leadership requires some soft skills traits in order to gain followers' support and attention, as well as cooperation.

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people (Kamaruddin, Kofli, Ismail, Mohammad, & Takriff, 2012). A person's soft skill EQ is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organization (Kamaruddin et al., 2012). Equally, soft skills, which are normally referred to as people skills, are not easily taught, although they are very much needed in the leaders-followers interactions. These skills can be typically categorized into three major categories: personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and problem solving and decision making skills.

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia interprets soft skills as 'generic skills that include cognitive elements related to non-academic abilities, such as positive values, leadership, teamwork, communication and lifelong learning' (MOHE, 2006, p.5). Soft skills are divided into seven areas: (1) Communication skills, (2) Critical thinking and problem solving skills, (3) Teamwork, (4) Lifelong learning and information management skills, (5) Entrepreneurship skills, (6) Ethics and professional moral skills, and (7) Leadership skills (MOHE, 2006, pp. 9–13). Each of the areas contain 'must have' and 'good to have' attributes (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2011).

Professional training and development for employees is not uncommon in any organization. However, as organizations become more focused on the provision of behavior-related services (Kantrowitz, 2005), organizational scholars and practitioners are now displaying a growing interest in soft skill competencies and how they make a difference in an organization; recent studies have shown that they really matter. According to Weisinger (1998), more data that are empirical are coming out all the time to show that soft skills really do affect the bottom line of the organization. The recent interest in soft skills competencies appear to be related to the reported results of work success. No, wonder that organizations are more willing to invest in soft skills development for better work performance, especially at the high executives levels (Homer, 2001).

However, some researchers have questioned the performance improvement program, such as soft skill competency, and whether it leads to significant improvement in an organization (Renna & Fedor, 2001). It was argued that the provision of information and feedback about business activities and customer-related issues are now the focus of managers. This information is believed to solve performance-related problems (Dean & Evans, 1994; Lawler, 1998).

In addition, Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1994) stated that

the success of performance improvement programs depends on the system, which the management sets up within an organization that can adversely affect the employees' work performance. This view is supported by Moss and Tilly (2000), as they share the opinion that employees should be given more say and decision making power within an organization if job performance is to improve. Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder (1994) stipulated that even if all required information is given to employees, work performance will still depend on the ability of the employee to utilize the given information to improve his job performance.

The research model was designed to analyze constructs considered by the literature to be fundamental in determining trainers' effectiveness. Constructs of particular interest for this research are soft skills, training methodology, trainers' effectiveness, and work performance. The measures of reaction to training and end of course tests measuring learning are the most commonly used forms of evaluation for training and trainers' effectiveness (Kirkpatrick, 1976; Tannenbaum and Woods, 1992).

Over ten diverse classifications of the role of the trainer have been identified. These range from the simplest—the trainer role consists of just two elements: training practitioner and training administrator, to the more complex where, for instance, the trainer is attributed four major roles: adviser, exponent, diagnostician, and manager. The more recent classifications have mainly been based on research work that either aimed to identify the actual tasks performed by trainers or looked at social interaction and innovation.

The classifications proposed are mainly descriptive in nature, and they can be divided into three broad types. (1) Those based on the functional aspect (classifications concerned with the activities the trainer engages in or the services he or she provides); (2) those based on the positional aspect (classifications concerned with the power of the trainer in the organization and what influence he or she can exert); and those based on the proficiency aspect (classifications concerned with the trainer's actual or required qualities to carry out the job).

Clearly, in any consideration of the trainer's role, thought needs to be given to the exact nature of the organization he or she will operate in and its future development. It has been pointed out that 'there can be no single statement of what the role of a training specialist should be. It is conditioned by a combination of the objective necessities in his firm, subjective and personal elements brought out by the attitudes of managers, and his own conception of his role and personal skills—he and the job help to make each other'. Concerning trainer effectiveness, the literature has concentrated on two major factors: the power and influence that the trainer has in the organization and how this affects his or her work behavior, and issues concerned with personal competence, especially the 'core competencies' that a trainer must have in order to be able to successfully carry out the job.

The extent to which trainees have sufficient time and resources available determines the extent to which training content will be used or constrained on the job (Noe, 1986; Russ-Eft, 2002). These opportunities to use training on the job have been defined as 'the extent to which a trainee is provided with or actively obtains work experiences relevant to the tasks for which he or she was trained' (Ford, Quinones, Segó, & Speer Sorra, 1992). Training method has been reported to have significant impact on the transfer of both hard and soft skills (Arthur, Young, Jordan, & Shebilske, 1996). According to Simone and Nale (2010), spaced training was superior to massed training regarding transfer quality (number of steps implemented after the training), self-reported sales competence, and organizational outcomes (key figures). The synergy effect of the experiential learning model and spaced learning will give a remarkable and successful transfer of skills acquired during

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