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Service quality in Malaysian public sector: The role of transfer of training

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Abstract

One important and essential factor that influence service quality is training. However, the impact of training on service quality is still inconsistent in the literature. Therefore, a more detailed scrutiny of this relationship is clearly warranted. This study is conducted to further study this relationship by exploring the possibility that transfer of training is a mediator in the relationship between training and employee service quality. The data for this study were collected from employees of public sector organizations in Malaysia. The results from the present study supported the hypothesized mediation of transfer of training on the training-service quality relationship.

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1. Introduction

Review of the literature revealed that there is still ambiguity among researchers regarding the association between training and service quality. Although a number of studies found a significant relationship between training and service quality (Beigi and Shirmohammadi, 2011; Chand and Katou, 2007; Schneider and Bowen, 1993), a number of studies reported insignificant results (Cook and Verma, 2002; Hung, 2006; Zerbe, Dobni and Harel, 1998). Therefore, a more detailed scrutiny of this relationship is clearly warranted.

This study is conducted to further study this relationship by exploring the possibility that transfer of training is a mediator in the relationship between training and employee service quality. Such mediating effect could be exist due

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to previous studies found that employees who learned and gained new knowledge from the training they have attended are able to transfer the training outcomes to their workplace (Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Nijman, Nijhof, Wognum and Veldkamp, 2006; Tziner, Fisher, Senior and Weisberg, 2007). There is also study indicated that transfer of training is positively and significantly associated with service quality (Zumrah, Boyle and Fein, 2013). Based on both findings, this study argue transfer of training could mediate training and service quality relationship. However, till date, there is still lack of understanding about whether transfer of training mediates the relationship between training and employee service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The relationship between training and transfer of training*

Training is defined as a planned and systematic effort to provide and enhance employees' knowledge, skills and attitudes related to their job, through learning experiences with a view to working more efficiently (Blanchard and Thacker, 2010; Goldstein and Ford, 2002). Transfer of training refers to the consistent application of knowledge, skills and attitudes that have been gained during training, to the workplace (Blume, Ford, Baldwin and Huang, 2010).

Researchers in the training field posit that training is a prerequisite for transfer of training to occur in the workplace (Brown and McCracken, 2009; Frash, Antun, Kline and Almanza, 2010; Pineda, 2010). This assumption has been supported by a number of empirical studies that were conducted in various countries and organizations (Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008; Nijman et al., 2006; Tziner et al., 2007; Xiao, 1996). One of the reason why training has a positive impact on transfer of training is due training enable employee to gain new knowledge, skills and attitudes, which should enhance the employees' ability to use various cognitive and behavioral tactics or strategies to apply their training outcomes to their job.

2.2. *The relationship between training and transfer of training*

Researchers (e.g., Colquitt, LePine and Noe, 2000; Kontoghiorghes, 2004) argue that transfer of training could lead to better employee job performance such as service quality. A recent study shows that employees who apply to the workplace the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have learned in training are able to demonstrate quality of service to their customers (Zumrah et al., 2013). Researchers argue such relationship exist because employees are motivated to perform well at their jobs when they are able to apply what they have learned during the training (Sullivan, 2002). An application of the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes also provides additional input to employees in managing and performing their work more effectively and efficiently. Without transferring the newly learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to the workplace, employees may not be able to improve the quality of their work compared to other employees who do apply the training outcomes to their job (Pineda, 2010).

2.3. *Transfer of training as a mediator in the relationship between training and service quality*

The foregoing discussions suggest that transfer of training is a possible mediator of the relationships between training and service quality (Kenny, Kashy and Bolger, 1998). Employees who learned and gained new knowledge, skills and attitudes from the training they have attended, will applied the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they learned in training to their workplace following the training, which in turn enable them to demonstrate higher service quality to their customers. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis: Transfer of training mediates the relationship between training and service quality

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