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TRAINING PROGRAMS AND DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES WITH JOB PERFORMANCE

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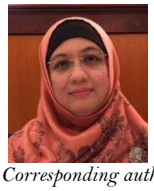

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the association between human resource practices, namely training programs and developmental opportunities; toward job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance. Malaysian engineers in the manufacturing sector of electrical and electronics in the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone, Penang were studied. Self-Administered questionnaires were distributed through several human resource managers and distributed to their engineers. The research tools were adapted and adopted from Conway and Monks on the training programs, Allen *et al.* (2003) on the developmental opportunities, Williams and Anderson on the task performance, and Hochwarter *et al.* (2003) on the contextual performance. This study employed demographic analysis, reliability analysis, correlations analysis, and regression analysis. As results, this study revealed that training programs of human resource practices among engineers had no impact on task performance and contextual performance. On the other hand, engineers indicated that developmental opportunities of human resource practices in their organizations had an impact on task performance and contextual performance.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the association between human resource practices, namely training programs and developmental opportunities; toward job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

For Malaysian organizations to survive in the century, they need to utilize their internal practices and exploiting all the available resources as a means to of achieving competitive advantage. Creating competitive advantage through people requires careful attention to the practices that best leverage these assets. An efficient and effective human resource systems and practices are the key formula of the organization to survive the global challenges. An organization that can identify the right human resource practices that enhance people skill and capabilities will have the strength to face the challenges of business today.

Human resources are considered the most important asset of an organization, but very few organizations can fully harness its potential. Lado and Wilson (1994) define human resource practices as a set of distinct but interrelated activities, functions, and processes that are directed at attracting, developing, and maintaining (or disposing of) a firm's human resources. In explaining the significance of human resources to firm performance, the

majority of work in human resource management has adopted the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991; Delery, 1998). According to this view, an organization can gain a competitive advantage from the human resources it possesses. This view human resource practices at a strategic level which is mostly named strategic human resource management.

Pfeffer (1994) stated that many organizations have increasingly recognized the potential for their people or employee to be a source of competitive advantage. Thus, understanding the practices or programs of the organization that contributes to the individual performance will enhance the overall organizational performance as raised by many scholars (Lado and Wilson, 1994; Wright *et al.*, 1994; Kamoche, 1996). In their studies, they concluded that employees are an important asset of the firm and the ways that they are managed are critical to the success of the firm.

Among the indicators of the poor performance are the delaying work completion, unable to meet deadlines, dropping numbers of "excellent rating" in the engineers' performance appraisal to "average rating", and delaying of megaproject decision making. Moreover, the compilation of the key performance index (KPI) by the Federation of Malaysia Manufacturer (FMM) from the member's human resource department's half-yearly report revealed that the performance of their technical engineers has shown a drop of 20 to 25 per cent in their key performance area (FMM, 2008). The key performance areas are the task performance area; such as product knowledge, product design knowledge, and ability to ensure all designs have considered input from various counterparts. The contextual performances are time management, prompt decision making, being assertive and human relations such as voluntary behaviors.

The consequences of the low KPI in the engineers would affect the firm's overall performance. This is consistent with the previous literatures that stated the effects of task performance and contextual performance on turnover, job satisfaction (Van Scotter, 2000) rewards (Kiker and Motowidlo, 1999; Van Scotter *et al.*, 2000) and overall organizational performance (e.g., (Motowido and Van Scotter, 1994; Borman *et al.*, 1995; Borman and Motowidlo, 1997)). Task performance contributes to organizational effectiveness either by transforming the organization's raw materials as a step toward creating the organization's products or by providing necessary service and maintenance functions, such as replenishing the supply of raw materials, distributing its finished products, and providing important planning, coordinating, supervising, and staff functions (Kiker and Motowidlo, 1999). Furthermore, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) argued that contextual performance, on the other hand, contributes to organizational effectiveness by supporting the organizational, social, and psychological context in which the technical core must function.

Acknowledging the importance of job performance, this particular study seeks to understand the engineers' job performance from the human resources practices perspectives and factors that influence job performance and professional development of engineers have important implications for their development. Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate the relationship between human resource practices, namely training practices and developmental opportunities, toward job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance among engineers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job Performance

Job performance has been considered an important variable in industrial and organizational psychology, such as employee training and job redesigning, the focus is almost always on improving job performance (Borman, 2004). Moreover, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) identified two broad classes of employee behavior, namely task performance and contextual performance. The distinction between task performance and contextual performance has gained wide acceptance in the literature investigating behavior at work (Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996; Conway, 1999; Griffin *et al.*, 2000). Both types of behavior are presumed to contribute to organizational

effectiveness, but in different ways (Kiker and Motowidlo, 1999). Also, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) propounded that, to have a better understanding of the job performance domain, behavioral competencies should be grouped into two main potential distinctions; contextual performance behaviors and task performance behaviors.

2.1.1. Task Performance

Task performance is when employees are using technical skills and knowledge to produce goods or services through the organization's core technical processes, or when they accomplish specialized tasks that support these core functions (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). There are two types of task performance.

Firstly, the activities that transform raw materials into the goods and services that are the organization's products. They include activities such as selling merchandise in a retail store, operating a production machine in a manufacturing plant, teaching in a school, performing surgery in a hospital, and cashing checks in a bank. Secondly, task performance consists of activities that service and maintain the technical core by replenishing its supply of raw materials; distributing its finished products; or providing important planning, coordination, supervising, or staff functions that enable it to function effectively and efficiently. Thus, task performance bears a direct relation to the organization's technical core, either by executing its technical process or by maintaining and serving its technical requirements (Motowildo *et al.*, 1997).

2.1.2. Contextual Performance

Contextual performance is defined as individual efforts that are not directly related to their main task function but are important because they shape the organizational, social, and psychological context that serves as the critical catalyst for task activities and processes (Werner, 2000). When employees voluntarily help coworkers who are getting behind, act in ways that maintain good working relationships, or put in extra effort to complete an assignment on time, they are engaging in contextual performance.

Contextual performance is conceptualized as being under the motivational control of individuals and less constrained by work characteristics than task performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). It is generally assumed that individuals can engage in contextual activities if they wish and that this choice reflects individual differences in motivation (Motowildo *et al.*, 1997). There are many reasons to expect high levels of contextual performance on the part of organizational members to contribute to organizational effectiveness (Borman, 2004). Contextual performance behaviors involving persistence, effort, compliance, and self-discipline might enhance the effectiveness of individual workers and managers (Motowildo *et al.*, 1997), coworkers' and supervisors' productivity (Borman, 2004). Helpful, considerate, and cooperative behaviors are expected to promote workgroup effectiveness and improve organizational coordination and control by reducing friction among organizational members and promoting a social and psychological context (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). Voluntary behaviors increase an organization's ability to solve unanticipated problems and adapt to change, and thus these behaviors should serve to improve organizational effectiveness in almost any work setting.

2.2. Human Resources Practices

2.2.1. Training Programs

Training programs consisted of formal and informal training for employees. The organization's commitment to providing training to its employees is clear evidence of an investment by the organization. Training opportunities are planned efforts by the organization to ensure that their employees are competent in their current jobs. Investments in training have been found to produce organizational outcomes such as an increase in productivity (Bartel, 1994; Knoke and Kalleberg, 1994).

2.2.2. Developmental Opportunities

Development opportunities prepare their employees for the future. Developmental opportunities prepare employees for other positions which will be available in the future rather than focusing on competencies for the current job. To sustain a competitive advantage, training and development allow the organization to align the development of competencies of its workforce with strategic goals of the organization, which might include, for example, new technology, new customer base, and new products.

2.3. Relationship between Human Resource Practices and Job Performance

Supportive human resource practices are instrumental in establishing employees' job performance (Guest, 2002; Harley, 2002; Park *et al.*, 2003). Traditionally, researchers established links between supportive human resource practices and firm performance (Huselid, 1995). However, the framework focuses on human resource practices that indicate investment in employees and recognition of employee contributions (Wayne *et al.*, 1997; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Allen *et al.*, 2003).

2.4. Theoretical Framework

Drawing from social exchange theory, this study conceptualizes human resources practices from an engineer's perspectives and job performance; mainly the task performance and contextual performance (Blau, 1964). Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework between human resource practices, namely training programs and developmental opportunities; toward job performance, namely, task performance and contextual performance.

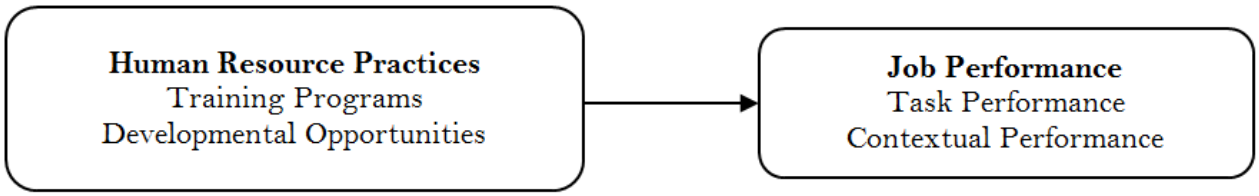

Figure-1. Theoretical framework.

2.5. Hypotheses

The hypotheses derived from the study's theoretical framework is listed between components of human resource practices, namely training programs and developmental opportunities; and job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance among engineers. The hypotheses are listed below:

H_1: Engineers' assessment of training programs have a significant relationship with task performance.

H_2: Engineers' assessment of developmental opportunities have a significant relationship with task performance.

H_3: Engineers' assessment of training programs have a significant relationship with contextual performance.

H_4: Engineers' assessment of developmental opportunities have a significant relationship with contextual performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional approach was conducted in this study. This cross-sectional type of research is also consistent with the previous studies on job performance (Guest, 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Muse and Stamper, 2007). This field study was conducted in a non-contrived setting, that is, in the employees' natural work environment with minimal interference from the researcher. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data regarding each study.

3.1. Population

The population of this study consisted of technical engineers of the electronics manufacturing company in the Bayan Lepas Industrial Zone in Penang, Malaysia, which have been the focus of the study.

3.2. Respondents

This study focused on the individual level of analysis. In this study, the unit of analysis was an individual technical engineer working in the electrical and electronics manufacturing, located at Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone. In this study, only engineers who have worked in the company longer than 6 months (an evaluation period) were included so that they can be assessed fairly by their supervisors. This study defined technical engineer as an engineer with technological degree or diploma level graduates, certificate holders/SPM holders who have climbed the ladder by the "rank and file". These groups of employees are chosen because:

1. They are considered as core employees at the executive level.
2. They are the largest pool of executive.
3. Their job tasks are critical to the performance of the organization.

3.3. Data Collection

A total of 1,100 self-administered questionnaires were distributed among engineers in the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone. The HR Managers of the manufacturing were sought in the effort of distributing the questionnaires to their technical engineers.

3.4. Research Tools

The research tools were adapted and adopted from 5 items of Conway and Monks (2008) on training programs, 5 items of Allen *et al.* (2003) on developmental opportunities, 7 items of Williams and Anderson (1991) on task performance, and 8 items of Hochwarter *et al.* (2003) on contextual performance as depicted in Table 1. Moreover, the reliability of a measure indicates the stability and consistency of the instrument in measuring a concept and helps to assess the goodness of a measure (Sekaran, 2000). Sekaran (2000) suggested that the minimum acceptable reliability be set at 0.60.

Table-1. Research tools' reliability.

Variables	Source	No of items	Reliability
Training programs	Conway and Monks (2008)	5	0.86
Developmental opportunities	Allen *et al.* (2003)	5	0.89
Task performance	Williams and Anderson (1991)	7	0.95
Contextual performance	Hochwarter *et al.* (2003)	8	0.94

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 181 questionnaires were collected and yielding response rate of 16.5%. From these, 31 responses were not usable. Thus, a total of 150 questionnaire with a useable rate of 13.6%. These data were analyzed using SPSS on the reliability analysis, demographic analysis, correlations analysis, and regression analysis.

4.1. Reliability Analysis

The study's reliability analysis was based on Hair *et al.* (1998) where only communality values of 0.50 and above are considered acceptable. Therefore, items were dropped from further analysis due to its low communalities value where one-item of training programs, two-item of task performance, and three-item of contextual performance. No items were dropped for developmental opportunities. Table 2 depicts the reliability analysis on each items of human resource practices, namely training programs with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.73 and 0.84 for

developmental opportunities; and job performance, namely task performance with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 and 0.86 for contextual performance.

Table-2. Reliability analysis.

Variables	No of items	Item drop	No of items used	Cronbach's alpha
Training programs	5	1	4	0.73
Developmental opportunities	5	0	5	0.84
Task performance	7	2	5	0.80
Contextual performance	8	3	5	0.86

4.2. Demographic Analysis

Table 3 depicts the demographic analysis of the respondents. Majority of the employees were male (n=96, 64%) as compared to female (n=54, 36%). Ethnicity, majority of the engineers were Chinese (n=82, 54.7%) against 42 employees (28%) were Malay, 24 employees (16%) were Indian, and 2 employees (1.3%) were under other ethnicities. Interestingly, the majority of the employees were not married (n=96, 64%) and 54 employees (36%) were married.

Table-3. Demographic analysis.

Item	n	%
Gender		
• Male	96	64.0
• Female	54	36.0
Ethnicity		
• Malay	42	28.0
• Chinese	82	54.7
• Indian	24	16.0
• Others	2	1.3
Marital status		
• Married	54	36.0
• Single	96	64.0
Age (years old)		
• 18 to 25	26	17.3
• 26 to 35	110	73.3
• 36 to 45	13	8.7
• 46 and above	1	0.7
Education		
• SPM	8	5.3
• Professional	5	3.3
• Diploma	10	6.7
• Bachelor	114	76.0
• Master	13	8.7
Engineering specialization		
• Electronic & electrical	97	64.7
• Mechanical	38	25.3
• Chemical	3	2.0
• Others	12	8.0
Organizational tenure (years)		
• Less than 1 year	33	22.0
• 2 to 5 years	102	68.0
• 6 to 9 years	13	8.7
• Above 10 years	2	1.4
Working tenure (years)		
• Less than 1 year	15	10.0
• 2 to 5 years	85	56.7
• 6 to 9 years	34	22.7
• 10 to 13 years	10	6.7
• Above 14 years	6	4.1

Almost 75% of the employees were aged between 26 to 35 years old (n=110, 73.3%) as compared to 26 employees (17.3%) were between 18 to 25 years old, 13 employees (8.7%) were between 36 to 45 years old, and one employee was 46 years old and above (0.7%). As an engineer, majority of the employees were having a degree (n=114, 76%) as compared to other qualifications, namely Master (n=13, 8.7%), Diploma (n=10, 6.7%), SPM (n=8, 5.3%), and professional certificates (n=5, 3.3%). Engineering specialization, majority of them were specializing in Electronic & Electrical (n=97, 64.7%) as compared to Mechanical (n=38, 25.3%), Chemical (n=3, 2%), and other specializations (n=12, 8%).

When asked on their tenure with the current employer, majority of them had been with the organization between 2 to 5 years (n=102, 68%) as compared to the others, namely less than 1 year (n=33, 22%), 6 to 9 years (n=13, 8.7%), and above 10 years (n=2, 1.4%). Finally, engineers were asked on the length of their total working tenure as an engineer and the majority of them indicated they had been working between 2 to 5 years (n=85, 56.7%). The rest of them indicated their total working tenure as 6 to 9 years (n=34, 22.7%), less than 1 year (n=15, 10%), 10 to 13 years (n=10, 6.7%), and above 14 years (n=6, 4.1%).

4.3. Correlations Analysis

Table 4 depicts the correlations analysis between human resource practices, namely training programs and development opportunities, with job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance. Engineers indicated that development opportunities (r=0.27) and training programs (r=0.25) had a low relationship to their task performance. Meanwhile, they indicated that development opportunities (r=0.39) and training programs (0.34) had a moderate relationship to their contextual performance.

Table-4. Correlations analysis.

Variables		1	2	3	4
1	Developmental opportunities	1			
2	Training programs	0.47*	1		
3	Task performance	0.27*	0.25*	1	
4	Contextual performance	0.39*	0.34*	0.53*	1

Note: *p<.01.

4.4. Regression Analysis

Table 5 depicts the regression analysis was conducted on human resource practices, namely training programs and developmental opportunities toward job performance, namely task performance and contextual performance. In the context of task performance, the engineers had the R^2 value showed 22% for the dependent variable of task performance, which was explained by the training programs and development opportunities of human resource practices. This means that 78% of the variance for task performance was explained by other unknown additional variables that have not been explored. The regression model (F=3.60, p<0.01) was proven to be a significant model due to the F ratio being significant in predicting task performance. Moreover, the developmental opportunities (β=0.27, p<0.05) were a significant predictor of task performance for the engineers. Unfortunately, training programs (β=0.01, p>0.1) were not a significant predictor of task performance for the engineers. Thus, this explained that the developmental opportunities were positively related to task performance among the engineers. Therefore, hypothesis H_1 is accepted in explaining the engineers on their developmental opportunities and task performance. On the other hand, hypothesis H_2 is not accepted in explaining the engineers on their training programs and task performance.

With the engineers' contextual performance, the engineers had the R^2 value showed 24% for the dependent variable of contextual performance, which was explained by the training programs and development opportunities of human resource practices. This means that 76% of the variance for contextual performance was explained by other unknown additional variables that have not been explored. The regression model (F=4.20, p<0.01) was

proven to be a significant model due to the F ratio being significant in predicting contextual performance. Moreover, the developmental opportunities (β=0.30, p<0.05) were a significant predictor of contextual performance for the engineers. Unfortunately, training programs (β=-0.06, p>0.1) were not a significant predictor of contextual performance for the engineers. Thus, this explained that the developmental opportunities were positively related to contextual performance among the engineers. Therefore, hypothesis H_3 is accepted in explaining the engineers on their developmental opportunities and contextual performance. On the other hand, hypothesis H_4 is not accepted in explaining the engineers on their training programs and contextual performance.

Table-5. Regression analysis.

Human resource practices	Job performance			
	Task performance		Contextual performance	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Training programs	0.01	Nil	-0.06	Nil
Developmental opportunities	0.27	0.05	0.30	0.05
R^2	0.22		0.24	
Adj. R^2	0.16		0.19	
F-Change	3.60		4.20	
Sig.-F	0.01		0.01	

In summary, the engineers indicated that the developmental opportunities provided by their employers have an impact on their contextual performance. Unfortunately, the training programs provided by their employer has no impact on their task performance and contextual performance. The summary of the hypothesis results is depicted in Table 6.

Table-6. Hypothesis results.

Hypothesis		Result
H_1	Engineers' assessment of the training programs is positive to task performance.	Not supported
H_2	Engineers' assessment of the training programs is positively related to contextual performance.	Not supported
H_3	Engineers' assessment of the developmental opportunities is positively related to task performance.	Supported
H_4	Engineers' assessment of developmental opportunities is positively related to contextual performance.	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The study offers several suggestions to human resource managers in electronic & electrical manufacturing organization in Malaysia. Although electronic and electrical manufacturing organizations have been implementing various HR practices especially training programs and developmental opportunities the extent of implementation some of these practices may not be extensive. The human resource practices' qualities in this study were assessed by the respondents to be high in human resource-related activities.

Human resource managers should use the results from this study to maximize job performance of their employees. Subsequently, this study found that training programs of human resource practices were not positively and significantly related to task performance among engineers. Task performance involves patterns of behavior that are directly involved in producing services or goods, or activities. When employees use the knowledge and technical skills to accomplish a task, they are engaging in task performance (Van Scotter *et al.*, 2000).

On the other hand, this study also found that developmental opportunities for human resource practices were positively and significantly related to contextual performance among engineers. This finding consistent with past empirical researches (Shahzad *et al.*, 2008). Example of the developmental opportunities in human resource programs is executive overseas mentor program which an employee is being sent to subsidiaries in overseas to learn

and indulge themselves in learning skills and knowledge about their work. Moreover, the results imply that engineers who have higher assessment of the developmental systems practices by their organizations would be more likely to exhibit contextual performance such as discretionary behaviors not formally required by any particular job, yet helping the social context of all jobs (Campbell, 1990; Van Scotter and Motowidlo, 1996; Motowildo *et al*., 1997).

Developmental opportunities were found to have significant direct effects on task performance. Meanwhile, developmental opportunities were found to have significant direct and indirect effects on contextual performance. Given that positive practices would lead to positive behavioral outcomes, the results from this study would guide human resource managers on how to increase technical engineers' positive behavioral outcomes by implementing the right human resource programs. Moreover, the findings also suggest that these organizations may want to strive further to improve their engineers' job performance; especially task performance, by continuing to provide adequate development programs on an ongoing basis. For those electronic and electrical manufacturing organizations that provide minimal formal development programs, findings from this study suggest that these institutions may want to increase the frequency of formal employee developmental programs.

6. CONCLUSION

The underutilization of human resource practices in enhancing engineers' work performance should be of concern to both organizations and society. From an organization's perspective, the turnover of qualified employees results in tangible and intangible costs. Failure to fully utilized half of the working population in the manufacturing industry is an ineffective utilization of human capital to the detriment of organizations and the larger society. Results indicate that implementing the right human resource programs will help organizations retain qualified professional technical engineers. Thus, this study provides useful guidance for human resources manager in electronic and electrical manufacturing organizations to strategize their human resource planning based on their engineers' needs.

Future research should continue to explore the potent construct of organizational performance. However, the limitations inherent in this research should first be addressed. Efforts should be taken to study other dimensions of human resource practices such as staffing or corporate social responsibilities dimensions. Perhaps, future research should broaden the dimensions of contextual performance as well as job dedication and interpersonal facilitation.

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