Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

MOTIVATION TO LEARN AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN TRAINING PROGRAM AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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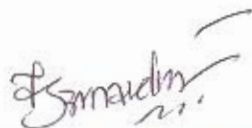I   I, BERNARDINE YEO KEN-PING

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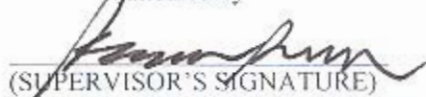
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ABSTRACT

MOTIVATION TO LEARN AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN TRAINING PROGRAM AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Bernardine Yeo Ken – Ping

This study was conducted to examine the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor's role in training program and job performance. Data were collected through in – depth interview and survey questionnaires. For the survey method, 100 usable questionnaires were collected from non – technical employees who are working at Telekom Malaysia (TM), Kuching. The outcomes of stepwise regression analysis showed that the relationship between motivation to learn and supervisor role characteristics (e.g. support and communication) does not positively and significantly correlated with job performance. This result demonstrates that motivation to learn does not act as a full mediating role in training management model of the organization. In addition, implications of this study to training management theory and practice, methodological and conceptual limitations, as well as directions for future research are elaborated.

ABSTRAK

MOTIVASI UNTUK BELAJAR SEBAGAI MEDIATOR DALAM PERHUBUNGAN DI ANTARA PERANAN PENYELIA DALAM PROGRAM LATIHAN DAN PRESTASI KERJA

Bernardine Yeo Ken – Ping

Kajian ini adalah untuk menkaji peranan motivasi untuk belajar sebagai mediator dalam perhubungan di antara peranan penyelia dalam program latihan dan prestasi kerja. Data kajian ini dikumpul melalui kaedah temu bual dan boring soal selidik. Sejumlah 100 borang soal selidik telah berjaya dikumpulkan daripada pekerja bukan teknikal yang berkhidmat di Telekom Malaysia (TM), cawangan Kuching. Keputusan pengujian hipotesis dengan menggunakan analisis regresi stepwise menunjukkan bahawa apabila motivasi untuk belajar dimasukkan ke dalam analisis, ia tidak meningkatkan kesan peranan penyelia (sokongan dan komunikasi) terhadap prestasi kerja. Hasil kajian ini mendapati bahawa motivasi untuk belajar tidak bertindak sebagai mediator sepenuhnya dalam model program latihan di organisasi tempat kajian. Selain itu, implikasi kajian terhadap teori, metodologi, batasan – batasan kajian, kerangka konseptual dan cadangan untuk kajian masa hadapan juga dibincangkan dalam kajian ini.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of eight sections. The first section is the background of the study. The second section confers the problem statement while the third section reveals the objectives of this research study. As for the fourth section, the conceptual framework is presented and in the fifth section, the hypotheses of this research study are stated. The sixth section of this chapter explains the significant contributions of the study and the definitions of terms are presented in the seventh sections. Section eight is the conclusion for this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

Supervisors, the fundamental element of the management are often referred to as a qualified and experienced leader, problem solver, as well as an important character in developing technical and human skills. They are also referred as a role model at the first level of the organizational management (Bittel & Newstrom, 1992; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; How, 1994; Pfeffer, 1998). They play an important role in designing, implementing and monitoring training programs by working closely with their employers (How, 1994). Supervising managers are given critical role in designing and administering different types of training program and it is done to

increase employees' competencies and job performance (DeSimone, Werner & Harris, 2002; MacNeil, 2004; Simons, Harris & Bone, 1999). In training programs designs, supervisors often act as a training designer, training planner, leader, coach, or mentor where they have to focus on objectives settings, suitable trainers selections, lessons plans developments, training program methods and techniques selections, materials preparations, programs scheduling and training need analysis conducts (DeSimone *et. al.*, 2002; Goleman, 2000; How, 1994). Supervisors administer training program by acting as a manger in order to ensure that the training activities are able to achieve the objectives (DeSimone *et. al.*, 2002; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; How, 1994). For example, they monitor and do follow-ups to strengthen and support the retention of the newly learned competencies.

In an era of globalized competition, many organizations have shifted their archetype from conventional job – based training to horizontal yet simplified organizational business strategies and cultures (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2005; MacNeil, 2004). This change has altered the traditional role of supervisors from just providing financial and budgetary support to establishing realistic learning expectations, encouraging positive reinforcements, creating positive impetus for the training program, making employees feel comfortable to attend training, as well as improving and developing employees' competencies (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Golemen, 2000).

Providing training itself and facilitate learning problems through on – the – job training, mentoring for newly appointed staff and orientation training for new employees are also part of the new roles of supervisors (DeSimone *et. al.*, 2002; Mondy, Noe & Premeaux, 2002; Simons *et. al.*, 1999). Responsible supervisors who are able to implement their critical roles in training program may motivate employees to enhance and improve organizational and employees' performance (MacNeil, 2004; Mondy *et. al.*, 2002; Rodrígues & Gregory, 2005; Tsai & Tai, 2003).

1.2 Problem Statement

Early studies about training management focus on the duties and responsibilities of supervisor in designing and administering training programs (Ellinger *et. al.*, 2005; Guerrero & Sire, 2001; Tsai & Tai, 2003). For instance, according to Pfeffer (1998) in a classical management approach, the roles of supervisor in training program are to recognize and resolve problems of employees' deficiencies in work performance. The higher level management will take full, entire responsibilities to overcome deficiencies in the design and administration of training program (How, 1994). Supervisor as the middle person between the top management and employees identify employees who need training and also the type of training they need and shortly suggest their names to the top management (Ibrahim, 2001; Mondy *et. al.*, 2002).

Supervisor's role went through some changes in the contemporary management approach. Training programs are designed and administered to support organizational strategy and objectives. The roles of supervisor became more focus on the development of their subordinates in terms of their knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes while ensuring the accountability for training design (e.g. determining the content of the training program and lesson plan) and lastly enhancing involvement in training needs analysis under this approach (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Nijman, 2004). The role of supervisor in training program has been described in detail in these findings. Nevertheless, the supervisor's role in giving impact on individual attitudes and behavior has been less emphasized (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; DeSimone *et. al.*, 2002; Tsai & Tai, 2003).

Lately supervisors have more complex and multipart roles in managing employees' performance. Recent studies in training management revealed that the supervisor's role may influence employees' job performance (Tsai & Tai, 2003). For instance, support and communication are identified as two important types of supervisor role in training program. Supervisors' effort in implementing these two important roles may increase employees' job performance (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005).

Interestingly, a thorough study on this relationship shows the effect of supervisor's role on employees' job performance is indirectly affected by motivation to learn (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Nijman, 2004). Many scholars (e.g. Ayres, 2005; Colquitt, LePine & Noe, 2000; Nijman, Wognum & Veldkamp, 2006; Noe, 1986) describe motivation to learn as employees' enthusiasm to attend training programs, participate to learn and master training as well as the intention to use new knowledge, skills and attitudes on the job. This relationship revealed that supervisors' ability to support trainees (e.g. encouraging and guiding) and openly communicate the training information (e.g. feedback and discussion) to the trainees, will increase trainees' motivation to learn, as a result lead to increased job performance (Tsai & Tai, 2003).

Although the nature of this relationship has been studied in the past, not much information is known about the mediating role of motivation to learn in training management models (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Nijman, 2004). According to many researchers, the mediation effect of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor's role in training programs is given less attention in previous studies is caused by the lack of rigorous theoretical and methodological framework (Ayres, 2005; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999).

In terms of theoretical standpoint, classical learning theories are unable to describe a comprehensive learning transfer process (Goldstein, 1993). As noted by Goldstein (1993), Knowles (1973) and Wilson (2000), traditional learning theories that are developed based on children and animal learning experiments are unsuitable to be applied in a complex adult human learning. Specifically, traditional learning theories stressed on the effects of environmental stimuli and reinforcement, but neglected the critical intervening effects of cognition on human learning (DeSimone et. al., 2002; Subedi, 2004). As a result, prior studies that integrated the notion of early learning theories (e.g. Gumuseli & Ergin, 2002) tended to focus exclusively on examining a direct relationship between transfer climate factors (e.g. manager's role, supervisor's role and peer's role) and training outcomes without emphasizing on the mediating mechanism of motivation to learn (Ayres, 2005; Machin & Fogarty, 2004).

With respect to methodological perspective, previous studies that were conducted with students under laboratory conditions often raise the issue of ecological validity (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Klein, Noe & Wang, 2006; Knowles, 1973; Stansfield & Longenecker, 2006). Cheng and Ho (2001) and Sekaran (2002) argue that data collected from college students under laboratory study could be different from the data gathered from organizational personnel. This could lead to the lack of comprehensive understanding about the central role of motivation to learn in explaining the effect of supervisor's role in training programs on training outcomes in

actual setting. Depending on these reasons, the mediating effect of motivation to learn in training management models is less emphasized by previous studies. Therefore, it motivates the researcher to further explore the nature of this relationship.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research study is to examine the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor's role and job performance.

1.3.2 Specific Objective

1. To examine the mediating effect of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor support and job performance.

2. To examine the mediating effect of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor communication and job performance.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable   Mediating Variable   Dependent Variable
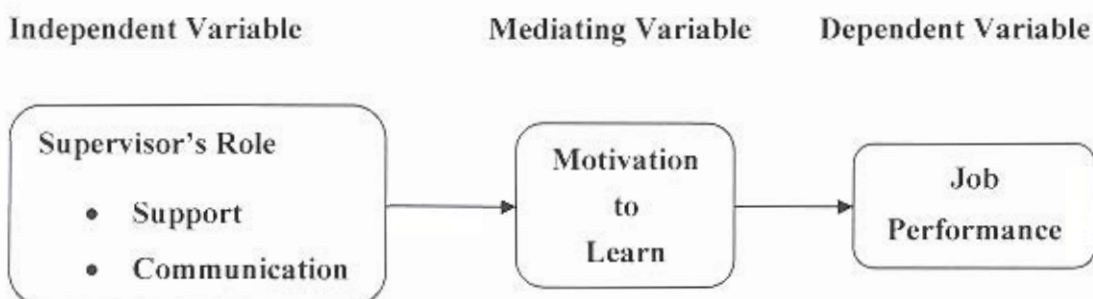
Figure 1.1: Relationship between Supervisor's Role, Motivation to Learn and Job Performance

This framework shows that Motivation to Learn plays an important role as a mediator in the relationship between Supervisor's Role (Supervisor Support and Supervisor Communication) and Job Performance. This framework is used as a guideline to establish research hypotheses.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H1:   Motivation to learn positively mediates the relationship between supervisor support and job performance.

H2:   Motivation to learn positively mediates the relationship between supervisor communication and job performance.

1.6 Importance of the Study

The importance of the study is divided into three main areas such as to the theory, to the research methodology and to the human resource practitioners.

1.6.1 Importance to the Theory

Past theories have not highlighted the correlation between the supervisor's role in training program, motivation to learn and job performance. Those theories failed to explain how training and development program affect job performance through motivation to learn. Most of the previous studies on training depend greatly on the conception of classical learning theories (Colquitt *et. al.*, 2000; Knowles, 1973; McCoy, 2006; McGuire & Cseh, 2006). Early learning theories are mostly developed based on children and animal learning experiments (Goldstein, 1993; Knowles, 1973; Wilson, 2000). For example, behaviorist psychologist (e.g. Pavlov, Skinner and Watson) conducted experiments on the animals' response to stimuli and concluded that the findings are applicable in human learning process (DeMar, 1988; Wilson, 2000). In other terms, this theory argues that human learns simply through a process of receiving a stimulus that evokes a respond (Burns, 2002; Wilson, 2000).

Nevertheless, many contemporary scholars argue that the concept of traditional learning theories (e.g. behaviorism and operant conditioning) did not attempt to explore the effect of motivation to learn in terms of the subjective and emotional states of human being (Knowles, 1973; Subedi, 2004; Wlodkowski, 1993). As a result, these theories are no longer applicable in the current training programs that depend very much on employees' motivation to learn to achieve training goals and objectives (Harris & Cole, 2007).

Besides that, although training theories and supervisor's related training transfer have been robustly researched in the context of modern western countries, they have not been thoroughly tested in the context of developing countries (Hameed & Analoui, 1999; Subedi, 2004). As a result, it raises the issue of generalisability of the theories and findings across cultural and institutional dimensions (Abdullah, 1992; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovicth & Topolnytsky, 2002; Switzer, Nagy & Mullins, 2005).

Therefore, by further exploring the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor's role in training programs and training outcomes such as job performance as projected by a number of researchers (e.g. Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Ismail & Bongogoh, 2007; Tracey, Hinkin, Tannenbaum & Mathieu, 2001), this study could improve classical learning theories' propositions that have simple and limited perceptions on adult human learning to a more holistic view.

1.6.2 Importance to the Research Methodology

On the contrary to the current methods that most researchers use today, early studies frequently used laboratory study and college students as a sample of study (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Stansfield & Longenecker, 2006; Wlodkowski, 1993). Laboratory study is much preferred by researchers due to some advantages. Firstly, laboratory study makes it easier for a researcher to manipulate the independent variables in a situation to boost the extent of its causality on dependent variables. Secondly, it permits a researcher to effectively manage the outcome of other irrelevant or inappropriate variables that could influence the dependent variables. And thirdly, the experimentation cost incurred are low (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Sekaran, 2002).

Although laboratory study has such advantages, many scholars argue that this approach has drawbacks that could affect the external validity of research findings (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Sekaran, 2002). For example, the main disadvantage of the laboratory study is the issue of limited generalisability and artificiality of research findings (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Tai, 2006). Hence, the application of results found from laboratory study to an organizational setting is questionable (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Sekaran, 2002; Tai, 2006).

Additionally, prior studies on training that used college students as a sample (e.g. Guzley, Avanzino & Bor, 2001; Klein *et. al.*, 2006) is inadequate to reflect the nature of supervisor's role in training programs, motivation to learn and training outcomes in a workplace setting (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Tai, 2006). Thus, past studies that incorporated laboratory experiments are lack of applied understanding of how supervisor's role may affect employee's motivation to learn and training outcomes (e.g. job performance) in workplace conditions (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Tai, 2006).

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative cross – sectional design. The combinations of literature findings, in – depth interview, pilot study and survey questionnaires will minimize the mistakes in data collection procedure as well as to ensure validity and reliability of the research instrument. The reliability and validity of the research study will be augmented and this leads to the production of more precise results (Cresswell, 1998; Sekaran, 2002).

Additionally, in – depth interview will be conducted to understand the nature of supervisor's role in training programs, employees' motivation to learn and job performance in the organizations. It may aid the researcher to design valid and reliable questionnaires for the respondents (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Easterby – Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002). Then, pilot study will be carried out to verify the content and format of the questionnaires. Lastly, data will be collected through survey questionnaires that will be distributed to the non – technical employees of Telekom Malaysia (TM).

According to Ismail and Bongogoh (2007), the data gathered through training management literature, in-depth interview, pilot study and survey questionnaires have exceeded an acceptable standard of validity and reliability analysis. Further, the sample of this study will be taken from organization's personnel that may help the researcher to maximize the external validity of research findings. As a result, it may