SUPERVISOR’S ROLE AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengukur kesan peranan penyelia ke atas prestasi kerja. Kaedah tinjauan telah digunakan untuk mengumpul 100 borang soalselidik yang diisi dengan lengkap oleh pekerja teknikal yang berkhidmat di Bahagian Teknikal, Dewan Bandaraya Kuching Utara (TCDBKU). Keputusan analisa 'regresi stepwise' menunjukkan bahawa sokongan penyelia dan komunikasi penyelia mempunyai hubungan yang positif dan signifikan dengan prestasi kerja. Dapatan ini mengesahkan bahawa peranan penyelia tersebut mampu bertindak sebagai faktor yang boleh menambahbaikan prestasi kerja di organisasi kajian. Implikasi kajian ini kepada teori dan amalan mengurus latihan, had-had kerangka teori dan metodologi kajian, serta arah tuju kajian akan datang turut mendapat perhatian dalam kertas kerja ini.

INTRODUCTION

Supervisors are often viewed as an experienced leader, problem solver and role model at the first level of organisational management (Adair, 1988; How, 1994; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999). They work together with their employers to design, implement and monitor the organisational policies, procedures and plans, including training programmes (Comstock, 1994; Robbins & DeCenzo, 2004; How, 1994). Training programme is a strategic function of human capital management where it focuses on developing employee competencies to overcome daily problems that may lead to support the development and growth of an organisation in future (DeSimone, Warner & Harris, 2002; MacNeil, 2004). In the traditional management perspective, supervisors are given much responsibility by an employer to identify daily, routine and short-term employee deficiencies, as well as report such deficiencies to the top management. Top management will identify the training requirements to overcome such employee deficiencies (Pfeffer, 1998; Rodrigues & Gregory, 2005).

In an era of global competition, many organisations have shifted their paradigms from traditional job based training to organisational business strategies and cultures (Ellinger, Ellinger & Keller, 2005; MacNeil, 2004). Under this approach, supervisors are empowered by an employer to effectively design and administer training programmes to develop useful competencies for future organisational development. In the design of training programmes, supervisors often work together with the management team and employees in establishing objectives, selecting suitable trainers, developing lesson plans, selecting programme methods and techniques, preparing materials, scheduling
the programme, as well as conducting training needs analysis (Adair, 1988; Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Golemen, 2000; Nijman, 2004). In the administration of training programmes, supervisors usually refer to the management team and experienced employees to ensure that the implementation of training activities may achieve the objectives (Adair, 1988; DeSimone et al., 2002; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999). For example, the role of supervisors in administering training programmes does not only provide financial and physical facility supports, but they also have the capabilities to establish realistic learning expectations, encourage positive reinforcements, create a positive impetus for the training programme, make employees feel comfortable to attend training, and improve and develop employees’ competencies (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Golemen, 2000).

Many scholars advocate that the ability of supervisors to properly carry out the challenging roles may strongly increase job performance (Chiaburu & Takleab, 2005; Tsai & Tai, 2003). For example, support and communication are identified as two important features of supervisor’s role. If supervisors were able to provide sufficient support and practise communication openness, this can increase employee performance (Golemen, 2000; Nijman, 2004). Interestingly, a careful investigation of such relationships reveals that the ability of supervisors to provide sufficient supports (e.g. encouragement and guidance) and openly communicating the information about training programme (e.g. feedback and discussion) to trainees, will invoke their motivation to learn, and this may lead to increased job performance (Martocchio & Webster, 1992; Tsai & Tai, 2003).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Support and communication are two crucial issues of a supervisor’s role in training programmes. Supervisor support is referred to as a supervisor who provides encouragement and opportunities to employees to improve their performance in organisations (Hucyzynski & Lewis, 1980; Robbins & DeCenzo, 2004). In workplace training management, it is often defined as a supervisor who encourages trainees to attend training programmes, helps employees before, during and after training programmes in terms of time, budgetary support and resources, involves employees in decision-making, and guides trainees in applying competencies that they have learnt in the workplace (DeSimone et al., 2002; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; Nijman, 2004). Supervisor communication is often defined as the activity or process of expressing ideas or feelings while giving people information, as well as exchanging ideas and information between a person or a group through symbols, actions, written or spoken words in order to impart information and ideas effectively (Harris, Simon & Bones, 2000; Hornby, 2000; Lumsden...
In the workplace training context, communication refers to a supervisor openly delivering information about the procedures, content, tasks and objectives of the training programme, conducting discussion about tasks that should be learned, giving detailed explanations about the benefits of attending training programmes and providing performance feedback (Harris et al., 2000; Sisson, 2001). Job performance is generally defined as individual employees accomplishing their respective work goals, meet their expectations or achieve a benchmark set up by their organisations (Bohlander, Snell, & Sherman, 2001; Eysenck, 1998). Specifically, in a training programme, job performance is often defined as an employee’s learning of a particular knowledge, skills and behaviour during training sessions that may be applied to achieve job targets (Goldstein & Ford, 1992; Robbins & DeCenzo, 2004).

Many researchers argue that socio-cultural differentiations are among the important factors that affect training programme management in organisations (Desimone et al., 2002; Goldstein & Ford, 2002). For example, one dimension of culture that can have implications for attitudes to training programmes is the concept of collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is perceived as the norm and standard that practises large power distance (e.g., more hierarchical structure and centralised decision making) and emphasises more on group interests, co-operation, loyalty and harmony. Individualism is a term used to describe the value and standard that practise low power distance (e.g., less hierarchy and decentralised decision making) and focus more on individual achievement (Hofstede, 1991; Redding & Wong, 1993).

The literature suggests that Malaysian tends to reflect collectivism culture. The influence of collectivism culture in Malaysian public sector can be traced in the website of the Public Service Department (PSD). For example, the government of Malaysia has established a National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) as a human capital development centre to design and implement the various types of training programmes for government departments in this country, as well as conduct certain international courses. Participants that attend the training programmes are from the top, middle and low management levels who work in the federal government agencies, state government agencies and local authorities. The primary objective of a training programme is to prepare public administration to support the changes of national development, vision, mission and goals (Mat, 1988; Siew Nooi, 1988; INTAN, 2007). In order to improve the customers' needs at the grass root level, INTAN first established a Center for Urban and Environmental Management in September 2000. This center was restructured to become the Local Government and District Management in January 2004. Its main function is to improve the capacity and capability of local authorities in providing services and managing resources, formulate positive changes in
developing and managing local government and to meet the customers' needs (INTAN, 2007).

The nature of the Malaysian public sector has affected the administration of training programmes in Malaysian local government. It consists of three types of local authorities: city hall, municipality council and district council. These authorities are responsible to the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. These authorities rely very much on traditional incomes from the taxes besides the federal government fund to sponsor rural and urban development projects (Jabatan Kerajaan Tempatan Malaysia, 2007). Due to the many commitment, these authorities do not have sufficient budget for training programmes. This situation encourages the management to send their staff (e.g., supervisor) to attend management and skills based training programmes offered by professional training providers and/or INTAN. Upon returning from such training programmes, they are required to conduct formal and/or informal training (e.g., coaching and mentoring) for their own staff. This approach is often practised to create positive learning culture and enhance competencies among staff. Specifically, in TCDBKU, all technical employees are entitled to attend training programmes sponsored by the organisation. In managing training programmes, supervisors have provided technical supports (e.g., budgetary, materials, facilities) and non-technical supports (e.g., encouragement, and practising good interaction) to motivate technical employees' learning and applying new competencies in the workplace.

The training research literature support the notion of human motivation theory, namely Adams' (1963, 1965) equity theory and Vrooms' (1964 & 1973) expectancy theory. Adams' (1963 & 1965) equity theory states that unfair or fair treatment has a significant impact on individual attitudes and behaviours. Application of this theory in training management shows that employees who receive fair support from their supervisors while applying and attending training programmes will lead to increased job performance (Chiaburu & Takleab, 2005; DeSimone et al., 2003). Besides that, Vrooms' (1964 & 1973) expectancy theory highlights that an individual who understand clearly the valued outcome of particular events will motivate his/her action. The application of this theory in training management shows that the ability of a supervisor to openly and honestly communicate the value of attending training programmes and the importance of learning new competencies will strongly increase job performance (Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; Goldstein & Ford, 1992). Therefore, it was hypothesised that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between supervisor support and job performance
H2: There is a positive relationship between supervisor communication and job performance
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional research design that allowed the researchers to integrate training management literature, the in-depth interview, the pilot study and the actual survey as a main procedure to gather data. The use of such methods may gather accurate and less biased data (Cresswell, 1998; Sekaran, 2000). At the initial stage of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted involving six experienced technical employees, namely an experienced technician, an assistant Human Resource Manager, a Head of the Training Unit, a supervisor and two senior officers of the Technical Department. Information gathered from the interviews were used to develop the content of a survey questionnaire for use as a pilot study. Next, a pilot study was done by discussing the survey questionnaires with the above participants. Their feedbacks were used to verify the content and format of survey questionnaires for an actual study. The survey questionnaire was used as the main instrument. It consisted of 4 sections. Firstly, supervisor support was measured using 6 items and it was modified from training research literature (Chiaburu & Takleab, 2005; Tsai & Tai, 2003). Secondly, supervisor communication was measured using 6 items that was modified from transfer of training literature (Foxon, 1993; Xiao, 1996; Yamnill & McLean, 2001). Finally, job performance was measured using 6 items that were modified from job performance literature (Hvang, Hvang, & Chen, 2004; Lawler & Hall, 1970). All items used in the questionnaires were measured using a 7-item scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Demographic variables were used as a controlling variable because this study also focused on employees’ attitudes. The back translation technique was used to translate the survey questionnaires in Malay and English; this may increase the validity and reliability of the instrument (Van Maanen, 1983; Wright, 1996).

The targeted population of this study was 195 technical employees of the TCDBKU. A convenience sampling technique was used to gather data from the sample of this study. 150 questionnaires were distributed to technical employees through contact persons (e.g., secretary of department heads, assistant HR managers, supervisors and/or HR managers). Of the number, 100 usable questionnaires were returned to the researchers, yielding a response rate of 67 percent. The survey questionnaires were answered by participants based on their consents and voluntary basis.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 14.0 was used to analyse the psychometric properties of questionnaire data and thus testing the research hypothesis. In terms of sample profile, Table 1 shows the majority respondent characteristics were male (92 percent), aged between 30 to 39 years old (47 percent), technicians who held Malaysian Certificate of Education (45 percent), technicians who worked less than 5 years (33 percent) and group leader and supervisor positions (39 percent).
The results of psychometric assessment for measurement scales were shown in Table 2. The original survey questionnaires consisted of 29 items, which related to four variables: support (8 items), communication (8 items) and job performance (6 items). The factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was done for all variables. The results of this analysis reduced the 29 items into 18 items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity were conducted for each variable. The KMO score for supervisor support was 0.84, supervisor communication was 0.66 and job performance was 0.87. These variables were significant in Bartlette’s test of sphericity. All variables had eigenvalues larger than 1: supervisor support (3.29) with factor loadings in the range of 0.83 to 0.92, supervisor communication (2.82) with factor loadings in the range 0.57 to 0.83, and job performance (4.02) with factor loading in the range 0.85 to 0.90. The items for each variable had factor loadings of 0.50 and above, indicating it met the acceptable standard of validity analysis. The result of reliability analysis showed: supervisor’s support (alpha=0.93), supervisor’s communication (alpha=0.86) and job performance (alpha=0.94). All the three variables had a value of Cronbach alpha of more than 0.63 which indicates that the variables met the acceptable standard of reliability analysis. (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). Table 2 presents the results of the analysis done on the goodness of data.

### Table 1: Participants’ Characteristics in TCDBKU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender (%)</th>
<th>Age (%)</th>
<th>Education (%)</th>
<th>Length of Service (%)</th>
<th>Position (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male = 92</td>
<td>20-29 = 27</td>
<td>Degree = 9</td>
<td>1-5 years = 33</td>
<td>Engineer/ = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female= 8</td>
<td>30-39 = 47</td>
<td>Diploma/ =20</td>
<td>6-10 years = 20</td>
<td>Planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-49 = 22</td>
<td>STPM =45</td>
<td>11-15 years = 20</td>
<td>Leader/ = 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;49 = 4</td>
<td>MCE/SPM =45</td>
<td>16-20 years = 25</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LCE /SRP/ =12</td>
<td>&gt; 20 years = 2</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PMR Others =14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 
N=100

SRP/LCE/PMR: Sijil Rendah Pelajaran/Lower Certificate of Education/Penilaian Menengah Rendah

SPM/MCE: Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysia Certificate of Education

STPM: Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
The results of Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 3. The means for the variables are from 5.5 to 6.2, signifying that the levels of supervisor’s support, supervisor communication and job performance ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (supervisor communication) and the dependent variable (job performance) were less than 0.90, indicating that the data were not affected by serious co linearity problem (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). The measurement scales that had validity and reliability were used to test research hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
<th>KMO</th>
<th>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.83 to 0.92</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>309.56, p=.000</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>82.17</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.57 to 0.83</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>214.74, p=.000</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>70.54</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.85 to 0.90</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>432.33, p=.000</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>80.37</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Goodness of Data

Table 3: Correlation Matrix Result for the Research Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>.73*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Performance</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Level of Significance = ‘*’0.05 level (2-tailed); ** 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N=100

Outcomes of Testing Direct Effects Model

As described in the Table 3, supervisor support positively and significantly correlated with job performance (r=0.35, p= p>0.01) and supervisor communication positively and significantly correlated with job performance (r=0.73, p<0.01), indicating that H1 and H2 were fully accepted. These results confirm that supervisor support and supervisor communication are important antecedents of job performance in the organisation.
Table 4: Result for Stepwise Regression Analysis with Job Performance as the Dependent Variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (Job Performance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlled Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Service</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Training</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Learning</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square Change</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Δ R Square</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Level of Significance = *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

As described in Table 4, the results of regression analysis were summarised in the two steps. In step 1, the respondents' characteristics were found to be not significant predictors of job performance accounting for 4 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. Step 2 showed the supervisor support (β=-.32, p=.024) and supervisor communication (β=.58, p=.000) were found to be significant predictors of job performance, accounting for 21 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

**DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of this study confirm that supervisor’s role directly affects job performance via motivation to learn. In the studied organisation, supervisors have provided adequate supports (e.g., encourage employees to attend training programmes and apply newly knowledge and skills that they gained from training programmes) and used good communication practices (e.g., provide feedback, encourage discussion and openly deliver information on training) when dealing with training programmes. The majority of the employees perceive that such supervisors’ role had increased their performance. When
supervisor roles have increased this may lead to increased job performance among employees in the TCDBKU sample.

This study provides significant impacts on three major aspects: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and contribution to the Human Resource Practitioners. In terms of theoretical contribution, this study revealed two important outcomes. Firstly, this study shows the relationship between supervisor support and job performance. This finding is consistent with the studies done by DeSimone et al. (2002), and Chiaburu and Takleab (2005). Secondly, this study also indicates the relationship between supervisor communication and job performance. This result is consistent with the studies done by Elangovan and Karakowsky (1999) and Goldstein and Ford (1992).

In sum, the findings of this study have supported and broadened training research literature published in most Western countries. Thus, the notion of supervisory role has been successfully applied within the training management models of the studied organisation. With respect to the robustness of research methodology, the data gathered using training management literature, the in-depth interviews, pilot study and survey questionnaires have exceeded an acceptable standard of validity and reliability analysis, thus leading to the production of accurate findings.

Regarding practical contributions, the findings of this study can be used as a guideline by the management to upgrade the effectiveness of training programmes in their organisations. This objective may be achieved if the management consider these suggestions: firstly, the supervisor’s roles can be sharpened if they are properly trained with up to date knowledge and skills in the training needs analysis, interpersonal communication, managing employee, change and conflict management. Secondly, supervisor’s roles can be meaningful if they are involved in organisational training committees. This will give them the opportunity to provide practical experiences for establishing the vision, mission, objectives and appropriate modules for training programmes. Thirdly, supervisors may effectively motivate employees to attend and apply competencies that they have learned from informal and formal training programmes if top management hires employees that have appropriate qualifications and skills. Finally, supervisors can be motivated to increase their efforts in monitoring the development of employees’ competencies if they are provided with better monetary incentives. These factors may positively motivate supervisors to support organisational and departmental training strategies and goals.

The conclusion drawn from the results of this study should consider the following limitations. Firstly, the data were only taken one time during the duration of this study. Therefore, it did not capture the developmental issues such as intra-individual change and restrictions of making inference
to participants and/or causal connections between variables of interest. Secondly, this study only examines the relationship between latent variables and the conclusion drawn from this study does not specify the relationship between specific indicators for the dependent variable, moderating variable and dependent variable. Thirdly, this study only focused on particular elements of a supervisor's role and neglected other important factors (e.g., employee's readiness, leadership styles of the supervisor and supervisors training framing). Fourthly, other training outcomes (e.g., job performance, job satisfaction and job commitment) that are significant for organisations and employees are not discussed in this study. Fifthly, although a substantial amount of variance in dependent measures explained by the significant predictors is identified, there are still a number of unexplainable factors that can be incorporated to identify the causal relationship among variables and their relative explanatory power (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Finally, the sample for this study was taken only from one department of the studied organisation that allowed the researchers to gather data via survey questionnaires. These limitations may decrease the ability of generalizing the results of this study to other organisational settings.

The conceptual and methodology limitations of this study need to be considered when designing future research. Firstly, the organisational and personal characteristics as a potential variable that can influence the effectiveness of employees' training needs to be further explored. If several organisational (division and ownership) and personal characteristics (e.g., gender, length of service, education level and position) are used in research, this may provide meaningful perspectives for understanding the individual differences and similarities that affect training outcomes. Secondly, the weaknesses of cross-sectional research design may be overcome if longitudinal studies are used to collect data and describe the patterns of change and the direction and magnitude of causal relationships between variables of interest. Thirdly, the findings of this study may produce better results if this study is done in several organisations (e.g., multinational and local companies). Fourthly, as an extension of the motivation to learn, other theoretical constructs of transfer climate (e.g., transfer of competency and attitude) needs to be considered because they have been widely recognized as an important link between supervisor support and training outcomes (DeSimone et al., 2002; Goldstein & Ford, 2002). The importance of these issues needs to be further explained in future research.
CONCLUSION

This study confirms that supervisory roles do predict job performance. This result has supported and extended training research literature published in Western countries. Therefore, current researches and practices within training management models needs to consider supervisory as a crucial aspect of organisational training system where increasing individuals’ motivation to learn may strongly induce positive subsequent personal outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, trust, good working ethics and performance). Hence, these positive outcomes may motivate employees to sustain and support organisational competitiveness in a global economy.

REFERENCES


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