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Training but no Training

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Abstract

This study aims to understand whether training plays an important role in the Malaysian Government and factors in producing effective training. This was a single case multiple sites qualitative case study. The respondents were sixteen officers from various grades selected by purposive sampling. Data were collected through open-ended interview and follow-up interview via teleconference and mobile application (Whatsapp). Constant comparative method was used to analyze data. The research findings showed that training is important but it is not effective in public service due to (i) training's structure, (ii) wrong training attended, (iii) trainer's characteristic and (iv) lacking of mentoring and coaching. The findings also showed that on the job training (mentoring and coaching) plays a significant role. This study has shown the factors influencing the effectiveness of the training among the public servants in Malaysia. The results reinforce importance of research and factors in contributing to an effective training program conducted by the Malaysian Government.

Keywords: Training, Efficient Public Servant, Qualitative, Factors, Effectiveness

Introduction

Training is a fundamental element in Human Resource Development. As the workplace and staffs in a company changes over time, it is very important to improve the effectiveness of education as well as to enhance the training efforts (Goldstein, 1993). Implementation of the training in organization also an expensive investment in organization. Some organizations spend more than \$200 billion annually on training by hoping an effective training with a good return on this investment (Awoniyi, Griego, & Morgan, 2002). However most of the training were ineffective and loss in this investment (Bunch, 2007). Training's effectiveness is a measure of the match between the training's goals and the outcome (Frazer, 1994). Effective training leads to positive learning outcomes while ineffective training leads to negative learning outcomes. Positive outcomes of a training showed an enhancement in self-knowledge (Brickson, 2000), abilities to complete given tasks as a team within different groups (Ely & Thomas, 2001), and enhancement of self-abilities to work together with people from different cultural groups (Ely & Thomas, 2001). While, negative outcomes of training includes negative attitudes of an individual's interpersonal (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004), higher intensity of interpersonal conflict (Harrison & Klein, 2016), and a poor managerial skills in order to develop and manage diversity in the workplace (Kochan et al., 2003). Truitt (2011) found that most of the employees (80%) had negative attitudes toward training and negative views on their job proficiency. The findings revealed that

ineffective training could lead to poor attitudes on performance, which then could lead to poor performance (Truitt, 2011). Shaheen and other researchers found that employees performance was significantly mediating the relationship between employees training and organization performance among school teachers (Shaheen, Naqvi, & Khan, 2013). Therefore, an effective training is needed to all organizations including the public sectors.

To enhance the service efficiency and productivity of public servants, the Malaysian Government has encouraged the public servants to attend training. This in line with the Malaysian current policy named Transformation 2050 (TN50). Even though, the Government of Malaysia has stopped the seven (7) days compulsory training due to budget constrains in year 2016 but most of the ministries and departments in the Malaysian Government still implements the seven days compulsory training. Malaysian Government continues to invest in training because empirical evidence proved that training will improve organization performance and competitive advantage (Bryan, Kreuter, & Brownson, 2009).

Training is a program that provides the participants with specialized skills and knowledge to be more competent in their current jobs to enhance an employees' attitude, skill and knowledge (Mathis, 1999). Most of the training that is delivered by the public service is through the traditional face to face interaction that is claimed to be the most important mean of conducting the training (Yildirim, 2017). But, there are a lot of dissatisfaction on public services delivery that is ineffective and underperforming which do not get better over the years. According to public complaints Bureau's statistics, the complaints had increased by 1.66%, from 6388 cases to 6494 cases between year 2015 and 2016. Some public servants were found to be underperforming, as their appraisal score were below 60% (Ali, 2015). There were also some complains that the Malaysian Government was bloated with public servants that lack in quality (Ghani, 2017) and are unable to deliver the expectations of the public.

Most research on training effectiveness are generally attempted to private sectors by focusing on training outcomes, training techniques and training environments. Therefore, it is a need to understand the factors that are associated to the approach and delivery of training (Saks, Salas, & Lewis, 2014). This is crucial because training do not always promises an effective outcome (Gegenfurtner, 2011) for some trainees tend to get bored, lack of impassion, frustrated and lack of satisfaction (Mamaqi, 2015). The result of this study can provide a new insight to the policy maker to have a better understanding of the factors as well as to avoid investment in training without achieving the aspired.

This study is guided by the following research questions: (i) What is training?; (ii) What is the purpose of attending training and (iii) What is the most important factor in contributing an effective training? These three main research questions aim to explore and understand the training experienced by the public servants and it would significantly contribute to understand the factors in producing effective training based on real case scenario in public services.

Methodology

This is a single case multiple sites qualitative case study. This study is not specifically seeks to test a theory whereas it is intended to understand in-depth on the Malaysian Public Service training (Rodríguez & Gregory, 2005). The participants were selected by purposive sampling which only included managerial level officers that involved in the training in their Ministries/ departments. There were sixteen officers recruited in this study, and it fulfilled the minimum sample size according to Creswell (1998) (Creswell, 1998). The sixteen officers recruited were from grade 41 (junior manager),

44 (senior manager), 48 (deputy manager), 52 (senior deputy manager) and 54 (director). Data were collected through open-ended interview and follow-up interview via teleconference and mobile application (Whatsapp) to suit the needs of the study (Baker et al., 2009). The interviews were recorded and transcribed and analyzed using constant comparative method to form categories and themes for the study (Wellington, 2000). The findings were validated through member checking method whereby each of the transcript was verified by each of the participant to ensure the credibility of the results (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Results and Discussion

Types of Training

Training has been classified as formal and informal training (Mark & James, 2015).

(i) Formal training is like classroom training, workshop and seminar. It is similar with our findings that respondents defined formal training are those training attended by the officer in a classroom, conference, seminar, workshop and others. Two respondents further explained classroom training and workshop training as below:

“Classroom training is when a trainer teaching in front with minimal interaction similar to the e-learning and m-learning while workshop training is when a trainer gives a lesson and subsequently assigns the trainee with an assignment. This provides them the opportunity to discuss”.

(ii) Informal training defined as self-learning through reading circular or sharing working experiences session between supervisors or co-worker (Mark & James, 2015). Mentoring and coaching also one of the informal training in enhancing employees' performance (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014). Mentoring and coaching were defined as on the job training; the process that designed by experienced employee to train and to develop skillful experts among new employees in a similar or actual work place (van Zolingen et al, 2000). Our findings reflected that public servants did not focus on mentoring and coaching as training in an office; which is consistent with the finding by (Awoniyi et al., 2002). There was only one officer stressed on mentoring and coaching was the most important informal training. However, empirical evidence has shown that informal learning (mentoring and coaching) has a significant association in enhancing employees' performance (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014).

Previous study also showed that a failure in the coaching will turn down an organization's performance (Saleem & Amin, 2013). Therefore public services in Malaysia should focus on mentoring and coaching as well as implementation with a proper and systematic structure.

Purpose of Attending the Training

According to one of the leading model of andragogy in adult learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998), a trainee must know the purpose of attending training (Rodríguez & Gregory, 2005), their role in the organization, and how they can contribute to the organization prior to attending the training (Bryan et al., 2009). The findings reflected that public servants attending training aim to (i) gain extra knowledge and filled in the competency gap and (ii) fulfill the requirement,

(i) Extra knowledge and filled in the competency gap

Many of the respondents described training as a program to equip public servant with knowledge, competency and skills to develop or increase work quality. Two respondents described deeply that training is to fill in the gap:

“Training should be only given to the people who is lacking of certain skill and competency to complete a certain job. Example if one person is lacking of writing skill, that person should just attend the writing training while not other training.”

The findings evidently in line with previous studies that training conducted for enhancing the skills, concepts, rules as well as attitudes that execute an upgraded performance in different workplaces (Goldstein, 1993). But the findings reflected that public servant has never focus on their competency gap which is a very crucial factor. The main purpose of training is to reduce the gap between professional skills of the personnel and the required skills for the job that leads to job reluctance (Chaghari, Ebadi, Ameryoun, & Safari, 2016).

(ii) Fulfill the requirement

The findings found a different point of view. In reality majority of the public servant attended the training were just to fulfill the requirement or been requested by the supervisor. Their comments is as below:

“Majority of my colleague and staffs attending training just to fulfill the seven day compulsory training or been ordered by the supervisor. While not really intended to seek for new knowledge. Some of them not even know why they attend the specific training.”

“I join the seminar or conference because been asked by my supervisor.”

The statistics of Public Service Department showed that more than 90% of public servants fulfilled the seven days compulsory training every year but the complaints regarding the competency of public servants remained high (Nyamita et al., 2017).

Public servants should not just attend the training for no reason. Public servants should understand their competencies gap and role in the organization. This can encourage public servants to choose the suitable training. It is relevant to optimize the training given if large gaps appear between the initial levels of competency and the required levels of job performance adequacy (Versloot, Jong, & Thijssen, 2001).

Factors Contributing Effective Training

The factors associated with efficiency of the training is a major component that influences an employee's and organization's performance (Rodríguez & Gregory, 2005). The findings revealed that there were four main factors in contributing an effective training (i) training structure, (ii) right training with right trainee, (iii) trainer character and (iv) mentoring and coaching. The conceptual framework as showed in Figure 1.

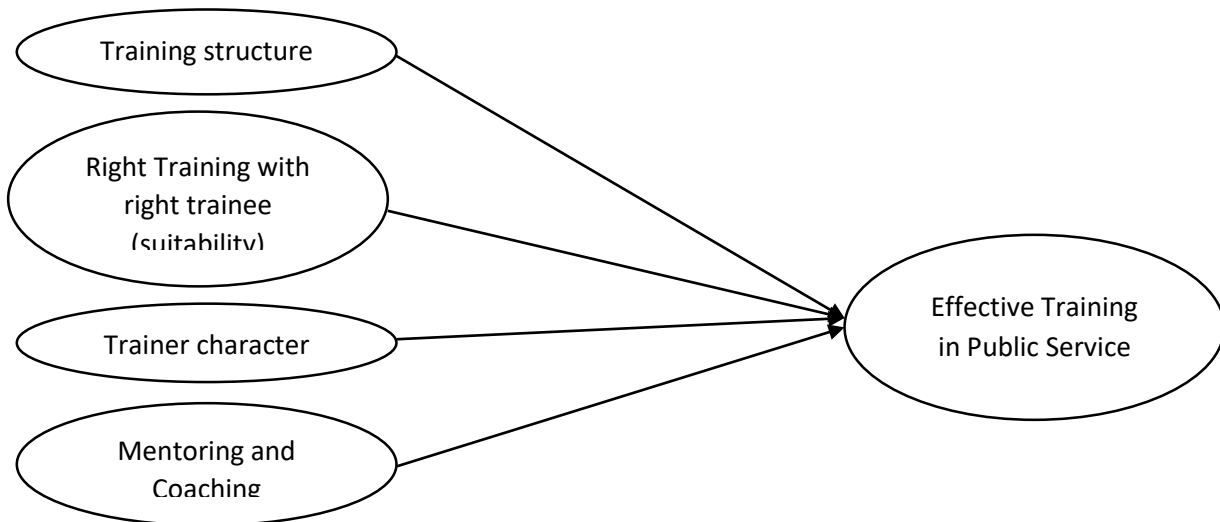


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for effective training in public service

(i) Training's Structure

The participants felt that training is effective according to the structure of the training. The participants must get involved in the training (theories), discussion, sharing of experiences, guidance, and question and answer (Q&A) session. It is more effective if the training can be conducted in a multi-dimensional way:

"A classroom training provides theories, knowledge along with minimal interaction, hence the training will be ineffective as we would not remember anything after the training. But if it is workshop training and it involves discussion, assessment or assignment. It is very important because trainees need to discuss and be involved in the assignment. Trainees can learn through experiential learning".

"The training would be meaningful if the training that includes discussion and experience sharing will be a better training while not just theory and it must include discussion as well as assessment."

This is consistent with the Hertenstein (2001) findings that the way that training been delivered can produce a significant difference in the way it is assimilated and retained by the learner (Hertenstein, 2001). Adults need to be involved in the training as they prefer to be in control of their learning (Bryan et al., 2009). Allowing an adult to share the control during the training will boost their motivation (Garrison, 1997) and increase the likelihood of achieving a successful training.

(ii) Right Training with Right Trainee

The right training should be provided to the right public servant which effectiveness of the training was associated with the trainee's work environment (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cheng & Ho, 2001). The respondents mentioned

"It is very important if we attend the training that is relevant to our desk or technical. A financial officer with financial training, a human resource officer with human resources management (government circular) and others, as this allows us to understand the circular in depth and ways to handle those problematic public servants".

"I still be able to use and practice technical matter such as technical circular even though the training that I attended was few years back. Therefore technical training such as financial, human resource management and circular was very important".

This also supported by previous study that trainees will show a positive attitude towards training if the contents of the training are useful, applicable and relevant for their current hands-on job or their future job which suite their desk and job scope. The results of this study is in line with a previous study (Rodríguez & Gregory, 2005).

Conversely in reality most of the public servants did not attend the training relevant to their desk or technical in reality. Most of them attend an easy going training such as motivational training, conference, seminar and other technical programs that are irrelevant to their desk:

"Me and my colleagues used to been asked to attend training relevant to discipline because we are from Human Resource Department even though we are not in charge of discipline".

"Some of my staffs and colleague attended the training is not relevant to their job scope and they like to attend motivation training."

It is considered as failure in training as new and additional knowledge can only be acquired when he/she has existing knowledge (Bryan et al., 2009). Consistently, with a new link of information with self-professional practices may form a meaningful knowledge especially among adults (Daley, 2010). Besides that, Nikandrou, Brinia and Bereri also explained that trainees are failed to transfer the training to their work although they are motivated to participate and learn in the training program initially if the trainees did not attend the right training (Nikandrou, Brinia, & Bereri, 2009).

Therefore, the Human Resource Department should have a good career planning suitable for each individual public servant.

(iii) Trainer's Characteristic

The study showed that trainer played the most important role in conducting a training. A trainer must be active, informative, experienced and be able to control the flow of the training. The trainer also must identify the exact ability of self-direction among the trainees compared to the ability perceived by themselves, in order to develop an enhanced training effect based on the trainees' context (Bryan et al., 2009). A good trainer needs to encourage full participation by the trainees to meet the curriculum and expectations in the training. To evaluate the level of achievement, the following questions can be asked: What is the knowledge do you need to gain to achieve the objectives of the training? If you were given a chance to plan the training, what are the aspects that you would include and what are the strategies that you would apply to deliver it? This is suggested by Chee (2014) where the theories of pedagogy stating that adults need to involved in the training process and know the purposes of attending the training (Chee, 2014).

In line with the budget 2018, the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0), the Government of Malaysia needs to transform to High Tech and High Touch and the world rapid growth following by the Industrial Revolution, public trainers must continuously update learning materials and explore with the current training technology. Public trainers were advised to be a high touch and high tech trainer as empirical evidence has proven that technologies are critical in enhancing the training's effectiveness (Landers & Armstrong, 2017).

(iv) Mentoring and Coaching

There was only one respondent insisted that formal training only has impact on knowledge enhancement which does not improving in working environment:

“Classroom training involves sharing knowledge only while mentoring and coaching involves working experience. Formal training is important in enhancing the knowledge while mentoring and coaching is more important in enhancing the working experience”.

This supported by the empirical evidence which proved that mentoring and coaching successfully increases mentees’ knowledge, capacity, attitude and skill. A successful mentoring and coaching program can improve an organization’s performance and development (Turner, 2012). Michael and Combs (2008) also revealed that coaching and mentoring support individuals self-learning to increase the level of competence (Michael & Combs, 2008).

Therefore, Malaysian Government should focus on mentoring and coaching in producing the most effective training at a lower cost.

Conclusion

Effective training is important to produce competent public servants in Malaysia. The findings of this study found that the trainings conducted in Malaysia public services were ineffective. There is still lack of training in enhancing career competencies for career self-development although the current practices focus in enhancing job competencies only. The right training should only be attended by the right officer (job scope) and to fill up the job competency gap.

The conceptual framework proposed by this study contribute to the body of knowledge on the elements of training structure, suitability of the trainee, trainer’s character and mentoring and coaching towards an effective training in public services, Malaysia. The results obtained in this study will assist the Public Service Department in planning, strategizing and implementing an effective training for Malaysian Public Servants.

Future research should emphasizes on the training in career competencies and incorporate with job competencies in order to enhance the performances of public servants in Malaysia. An effective and efficient public service is required to carry the nation’s activities to burse up the national economies.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the current study is that it focuses only on Public Servants in Putrajaya. Therefore it would unable to generalize from the results. Furthermore, the study only interviewed sixteen officers who were underrepresented for all the managers for open service in the public service while the effectiveness of the training should involve also the supporting staffs and officers from close services.

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