

Technician Career Progression System in Kellogg Malaysia A Study on Required Competencies and Outcomes

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Abstract: This study describes the technician career progression system in Kellogg, Malaysia. A set of competencies are required to be able to participate in the career progression driven by the technicians. To better understand the need of career progression, the outcomes expected of the technicians are discussed. Literatures show that it is clear that career progression is needed in organizations to promote a well-balanced work life and to value the talent in the employees. Theoretically, employee seeks for needs from the employers. Practically, a well-developed career progression will lead to loyalty and satisfaction. Study on manufacturing organizations with technicians will be able to give in-depth insight of this study.

Key words: Technician career progression system, career development, leadership skill, technology/technical skill, system skill, job satisfaction, pecuniary benefits

INTRODUCTION

Employees in general are the assets to an organization. An organization's success or failure sometimes could depend on employees who directly or indirectly impact the business. Employees and business works hand in hand. As much as employees need a job, the business needs manpower. Therefore, both are crucial to an organization. If an organization values it's employees it will go all out to ensure the competitors doesn't pinch it's employees. At the current situation of Malaysia's economy, it's almost impossible to retain employees to work in Malaysia. What more to not jump to other companies in search of better career opportunity. In an article that was featured in a local newspaper, Malay Mail, it stated that 93% of Malaysians are ready to quit country for jobs in view of better opportunity based on the report by World Bank in 2011. This is definitely an alarming Figure as Malaysia is a developing nation. Many local companies do not see this as a threat but Multinational Companies do put an emphasis on career progression. Sadly, especially local companies that has skilled and unskilled workers, career progression is not seen very important because companies are busy trying to make profit, expand business and cutting cost of course. The point missing out here is the employees well-being and needs. Although, they can be just workers, they are employees too who contributes to the business.

It is not seen as important as career progression for professionals'. In Malaysia, 10% of the workforces consist of locals with technical certificate or diploma also known as skilled and unskilled workers (Labour Force Survey Time Series Data, 1982-2014, Department of Statistics Malaysia). In a study that was conducted using the context of Malaysian workers from different industries, the findings prove that there is a relationship between career development and turnover intention. The study also mentioned that organizations that provide relevant quantity and quality development schemes are signaling to employees their likeliness to develop a cadre of skillful employees to grow together with the business. Promotion within an organization shows evidence of formal recognition of one's performance and ability rewarded with a rise in pay, work challenges, responsibility, status and autonomy. Employees view promotion as an achievement of their proven performance record towards career success. Hence, the need of career progression system is important to gain benefits that come thereafter.

The purpose of this study is to understand the technician career progression system implemented in Kellogg, Malaysia. Technician career progression system is simple term means "your career". It is a process intentionally designed to build capability in technical, systems and leadership skills to deliver exceptional business results and rewards. As this study focuses on

Kellogg, the turnover rate of Kellogg employees overall are 34% and particularly technicians is 29% within a spell of 10 months before the technician career progression system was introduced and implemented. The main reason identified for such turnover is technicians leave for better career advancement and opportunity. In a research study, it says that one of the challenges for career progression is the limited opportunity for promotion. The study also mentions that a proper career planning will lead to organizational effectiveness.

This study will answer the questions of what each competency needed for career progression and the meaning of it to the technicians. In the next session, the required competencies and outcomes are discussed by also addressing the theoretical and practical implications. Followed by the conceptual framework designed and the proposed methodology. Lastly, the future research directions will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource Development (HRD): Traditionally the human resource department was perceived as back end employees in the organization. More often than not, human resource is known for administrative and desk job. However, over the years human resource has evolved so much. Rather it has taken a transformation. Today, human resource is the business partner to an organization. There are even many terms related to human resource. Human resource has diverted to split roles such as Human Resource Management (HRM), Human Resource Development (HRD), Human Resource Information System (HRIS), Human Capital (HC) and etc., In this study, HRD will be the area of interest as it's more relevant to the study.

Human resource development is a process of developing and/or unleashing expertise through Organization Development (OD) and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance (Swanson, 2001). This indeed is a good definition of HRD as it emphasizes on the need of HRD with relevant partnership to gain the ultimate results. Organizations have recently split the roles of human resource personnels. Typically in current organization a HRD manager generally is responsibility for learning and development, retention and recruitment. As a supporting statement, the three main HRD strategies are training, learning and career development. Hiring is the beginning, learning and development is the sustaining aspect and retention is the end result. Ultimately, organizations would like to reduce the turnover rate. In order to sustain good employees is where learning and development comes into the picture.

Organizational growth is old school because employers used to believe that if the organization is growing the employees will grow. Current generation is the vice versa of that statement. Employees are asset to organizations and hence it's the responsibility of the employer to ensure their individual growth prior to organizational growth. If employees are happy and satisfied the organization will grow substantively.

In a study by Abdull Rahman, it was found that training, and long term career opportunity are the factors most likely to influence engineers' intention to stay working in a company. It clearly shows the expectation of employees towards the employer. A good career opportunity plan will directly have an impact on retention. Career development is not about "getting ahead", but rather about getting to be the best an individual can be and finding a place in an organization where they can express excellence and contribute to the goals of the organization. Career development encompasses "vertical" issues such as promotions and upward mobility but also "horizontal" movement (lateral job transfers) within the organization. Career development deals with the fundamental nature of the relationship of individuals to their work and employees to their organizations. A clearly defined plan of action prepares employees for the future and preserves an organization's ability to meet both existing and future needs.

Having said the above, how critical is the need of HRD? HRD is a relationship that gives happiness to both employees and employers. If either one does not gain anything, the relationship will eventually end. HRD is the integrated use of training and development, organizational development and career development to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness (Agwu and Emeti, 2014). HRD is not just a wholesome strategy, it also provides a better future for the whole organization.

Although, many studies have discussed on the roles, the needs, the term of HRD but most studies are not in recent years. There maybe a transformation in HRD which is not investigated and studied in depth. Changes are not easily monitored. It requires time and energy. Therefore, the perception on HRD may have changed. Also, there is a very thin line between the different terms used in human resource. HRM and HRD and human capital are very closely linked. However, the differences are not clear despite the characteristics being the same. The studies did not emphasize on blue collar workers which is the focus of this particular study. It's a norm to focus on professionals and certain targeted employees but not the workers. It's very obvious to know that organizations do not show enough interest in the well-being of the workers.

Theoretical implications: Many theories support the function of HRD and career development. The Resource Based View (RBV) theory is widely used in the area of management. Many literatures pointed out that Barney 1991 argued a lot on RBV theory. Fundamentally, the RBV theory understands the concern on how organizations can improve to sustain its performance and to compete with competitors. In a study by Professor Kerr Inkson and Professor Delwyn Clark, the RBV was used to reconceptualise careers and career studies, while career theory and research can supplement the RBV. RBV has done much to promote human resource management in general and human capital management in particular and to bring about a convergence between the fields of strategy and HRM.

RBV theory further specifies that firms with superior human capital are better positioned to create resources and capabilities characterized by asset specificity (i.e., how specific are skills/human assets to current firm than to rivals), social complexity (i.e. how embedded are individual assets in complex social systems of the given firm) and causal ambiguity (i.e., how hard is to identify who has the knowledge (tacit knowledge) and/or which knowledge is critical for firm performance), making them very difficult to imitate (Zikic, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that empirical applications of RBV concepts take a variety of forms. However, they all follow a common underlying logic: human resource activities lead to the creation of a skilled workforce, which will engage in the functional behavior of the firm, resulting in higher productivity and performance (Mazurenko and Connor, 2012)

Practical implications: From the practical standpoint, career progression differs from one organization to another. Organizations that are profit oriented do not give emphasis to career progression or the well-being of the employees. Where else organizations that believe its employees are assets will work with the human resource department to implement a good career progression as part of the sustainability strategy. This study looks at the career progression particularly in Kellogg Malaysia, a multinational company that is originated in the United States. It is also a known fact that culturally the origin of the organization is important to determine the benefits the employee will gain. For instance, the Americans give high importance to work life balance compared to Asians who slog for work.

The capacity of the organization also matter in career progression. Small firms do not have the budget and resources to have an extensive career progression plan in

place for employees unlike the big ones. Employees tend to lose out in career expansion when they work in smaller firms. Most small firms also consist of family businesses which hierarchy has been pre-set and hence no development is needed for anyone to be promoted.

This study will provide useful guidelines to most of the Multinational Companies, small medium enterprises and government linked companies. The aim to is have a workforce of balanced knowledge, skill and attributes. It's also crucial to have a workforce that is emotionally, socially and politically stable to achieve the nation's development and towards Vision 2020.

Competencies

Leadership skill: Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others (Jack Welch).

Leadership as we say is an important element in any organization. Leader is one who is able to guide others towards the right direction and to achieve goals. It's a journey that helps to torch the light for others to walk through the right path. Hard work and talent will only take you and your organization so far. A lack of leadership skill stifles any further progress (Poon *et al.*, 2015). Simply said, without a good leader an organization may not be able to grow any advance. Leadership skill does not only give direction but it provides guidance and supervision to move together towards the company goal.

Leadership can happen anywhere within an organization, at any level and in any job category. Some leaders lead through formal authority; others lead through influence and interpersonal networks. People at every level can act as leaders, and because people at every level sometimes need leadership rather than just people at lower levels (Musa *et al.*, 2011).

A common statement on leadership is "Are leaders born or made". Past literature reviews in 1990's indicated that leaders are born and not made. However there is not enough evidence to prove it. Leadership is a skill that can be developed in an individual (Ismail *et al.*, 2011). It comes with experience, knowledge and traits that can be formed through learning opportunities.

Technology/technical skill: Technical skill is a common criterion for most professional jobs such as engineering, maintenance, production and etc. The need of technical skill is to provide knowledge and expertise in a particular area. In a rapidly growing phase of technology, acquiring skills is crucial to keep up with the changes that's happening. Technical skills are critical for first-tier managers, serving several important functions such as

communicating effectively with subordinates, verifying the soundness of the decisions they make and making program-level decisions based on subordinates' suggestions (Hysong, 2008).

Key skills should include related occupations as well as specific, not only at the same level but between high and medium-level manpower, since it is not uncommon to find considerable overlapping of functions between professional and sub professional staff, caused by imbalanced occupational structure (Castley, 1996). Although this is from a past literature, it is indeed true in current organizations structure. Organizations tends to focus on skill development in the managerial or professional level but not knowing the lower level staff needs the skill development to perform the job too.

To enhance technical skills, there should be equal provision of material resources. Organizations should look into not just identifying the need of technical skill but rather the source of knowledge to provide the technical skill should come from a well-equipped trainer and to provide proper learning to workers to ensure the right message is being sent across. Technical skill can be on-the-job training which is defined as the learning of skills while performing the job or formal learning which is the education received by the employees (McDermott *et al.*, 2011).

System skill: A Systems skill is defined as the ownership of a specialized skill set specific to a certain area or result (adopted from Kellogg Malaysia). Systems are embedded in every part of the job. Having a system skill will enable an individual to maneuver a hardware or software to perform a job. System skill is just another competency skill to help in performing job better. Organizations must always adapt to system upgrades and enhancement of system skill is crucial.

The need to adapt system skill for career development is simplified to people, processes and machines. Learning skills is for coping with changing work tasks. Career development involves many aspects of system skill. Today's generations are very well equipped with skills and even many organizations have the need for employees to learn system skill to remain competitive. Technical and support employees are all encouraged to master a system skill. Accountants have to master the accounting system skill for the purpose of their job. Most multinational companies' uses SAP as a system skill and the benefit of such system is it links all departments and therefore all employees are given opportunity to learn it.

In a study by Shujaat *et al.* (2013), the UK government has introduced system person term which is defined as a person who has characteristics of extensive

knowledge, skills, experience and attributes in a an area. The authors also said Systems skills can be defined as the ability to apply your know-how while your technical skill or discipline gives you the intellectual know-how to solve problems.

The literatures that have been reviewed for the competencies are more focused on professionals and managers. There is not enough evidence to prove that these competencies are also needed for lower level employees in an organization. Apart from that, the literatures are somewhat mix between 10 year ago to date. The study on career development have been established long time ago and still is a topic to be discussed. Although studies have shown that talent retention is available at the professional level, it doesn't stop from switching the sight to workers. Talent can be anyone who has the ability to perform and add value.

Job satisfaction: Doing what you like and liking what you do are two different terms. Employees decided what they want from their career. In a working environment, liking what you do will give the job satisfaction. It's important to choose the right job but it's more important to love the job because the satisfaction form the job will lead to greater motivation and reduces turnover. Many literatures can testify to the fact that career development and job satisfaction are closely connected (Kayalar and Ozmutaf, 2009).

According to the RBV theory, competitive advantage of a firm lies primarily in the application of a bundle of valuable tangible or intangible resources at the firm's disposal as mentioned in the studies of Penrose and that of Winter and Nelson. In the early stage of the RBV, the main concern was to identify the characteristics of resources that are not subject to imitation by competitors. If the resources possessed by a firm can easily be replicated by competitors, even though the resources are the source of competitive advantage of the firm, then the advantage will not last long.

Having said that the job satisfaction lies a lot on the organization itself. There has to be a difference in what the organization can offer to employees to boost the job satisfaction. A good career development in place for employees can also lead to job satisfaction. Emilie. (2007) mentioned in her study that typically a blue collar worker seeks for material, psychological and social benefits from an organization. However, based from the study, career success is the expectation of blue collar workers in terms of job satisfaction. Perception of job satisfaction have changed. Monetary benefits are no longer priority for job satisfaction.

Mehta *et al.* (2014) mentioned that career planning and career management act as important predictors of job satisfaction. It is believed that job satisfaction at workplace will lead to emotional state and positive thinking. This will also help to boost loyalty towards the organization and not only able to motivate within itself but others tend to feel the positive energy and vibes. Creating an environment with high motivation will indirectly contribute to the performance of the organization.

Motivation: Employees are more conscious than decades ago. They know the expectation from the employer and they have in mind the return expected from the employer. In a study conducted in Makerere University in 2010, pointed out that motivation is a great contributor to the extent of employee commitment. They also argue that motivation cannot be in isolation it must go hand in hand with, among other things, learning and ability. Motivation can never be separated from Maslow's hierarchy of Needs. Maslow indicates that one can have intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures or rewards. Extrinsic motivation can be defined as doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. That means that outside encouragement or rewards are earned from performing a task rather than actual enjoyment of the task (Acar, 2014).

Intrinsic motivation: The intrinsic motivation is very much likely to satisfy one's own-self by fulfilling the basic needs. It's important to feel this intrinsic motivation to be happy within and to be grateful for the achievement. Intrinsic motivation helps to reduce stress and encourages one to appreciate opportunity given at work place. Maslow mentioned that intrinsic motivation can only be enjoyed if the basic needs are fulfilled. Every employee should build its own self-motivation or the intrinsic motivation. In every individual, it's important to feel the happiness within so it can be reflected in the performance of the work and socially able to be present. Learning, gaining knowledge and pursuing to develop skills are also a form of intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation: Every action comes with a price. That's just how human nature is. What's in return for me? That's always the question asked by employees. If there is nothing to be gained, the employee will not get the job done sincerely. Extrinsic motivation plays a bigger role in an employee. It is more valued than the intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation can be in the form of tangible and intangible.

Rewards and recognition: Praise, appreciation, rewards and recognition are common elements in motivation. It gives a good feeling to know when the job done is being valued by the management. That's what an employee would expect from an employer. Many ways of doing it and many companies have this in practice. There are managers who call out employee names during town hall sessions, gathering or any events to show recognition for job done. Some organizations have best employees awards and etc. The important point is to motivate the employee to keep the energy and spirit in them to work harder.

Pecuniary benefits: The ultimate motivate will always be in the form of the added value. Employees are fueled more with pecuniary benefits than anything else. Some of the pecuniary benefits commonly seen in organizations are bonus, merit increment, promotion and incentives. Incentive is an act of promise for greater action, it is also called as a stimulus to greater action. Incentive are something which are given in addition to wages, it means additional remuneration or benefit to an employee in recognition of achievement or better work. It provides a spur or zeal in the employees for better performance. It is a natural thing that nobody acts without a purpose behind. Therefore a hope for reward is a powerful incentive to motivate employees. Material-based achievement emerged as the most common definition of career success (Prewitt *et al.*, 2011). It is not wrong to feel that pecuniary benefits are more important because people do not work for pleasure. To sustain and live, it is money that is needed. A human resource personnel will know that most people look for jobs after the bonus is paid out in an organization. It's a common practice in Malaysia and employers usually sense a high turnover after the bonus month. This is where the pecuniary benefits kick in. If an employee is happy with the remuneration part of the job, it tends to be the best motivating factor. Many employees also do not get affected by position title but the increase in the salary that matters. For instance, some organizations have many incumbents with the same title but different grade to distinguish the nature of job. In the end what matters is that the incumbents are paid according to the responsibilities and accountabilities held.

A valued employee should be given a salary package at par or more than the existing industry average to get him/her to stay within the organization. For better retention of talent, organizations must improve pay/compensation and benefits (Wright *et al.*, 2001). This is a fact that cannot be denied and it is very important for organization to do a yearly benchmarking of market pay and compensation to keep up with the increasing cost of living and inflation.

Technician career progression in Kellogg, Malaysia:

Kellogg America which is based in Battlecreek is the headquarters of Kellogg company with an existence of over 100 years. Kellogg's vision is to enrich and delight the world through foods and brands that matter. Kellogg has expanded its footprint globally in 4 continents. As to date Kellogg has 30 over entities. In 2012, Kellogg was awarded the world's most powerful and innovative brands by the Forbes and nominated as one of the world's best brands by Interbrand, the Nielsen Company in the very same year. Kellogg started as a cereal company and over the years it ventured into other healthy food products. In 2014, Kellogg changed its game plan to go into snack food business which is Pringles. In view of that Kellogg started the first Pringles plant in South East Asia based in Bandar Enstek, Malaysia.

Kellogg America started the technician career progression system almost 20 years ago. It tested and refined the system to finally get the right way of doing it. Technicians are 70% of the workforce in Kellogg America. As to date, half of the technicians populations are actively promoted using this career progression system. As this is a career progression that is driven by the individual there are a small number of technicians who do not actively want to be promoted but found their comfort zone in their existing roles. Some of the technicians have even made it to the management position. This system has been a successful one in Kellogg America. In view of that other Kellogg manufacturing entities such as Kellogg Australia, New Zealand, India, Thailand have also implemented the technician career progression system within the recent two years.

In 2014, the same system was introduced to Kellogg Malaysia due to the high technician turnover. In Kellogg, the technicians consist of 82% of the total workforce. As such high turnover is a hassle in recruitment, it disrupts production and lowers the motivation of other technicians. The high turnover was caused due to better career progression. Hence, the need of this technician career progression system. As this was a successful initiative in Kellogg America, therefore the same is expected for Kellogg Malaysia. On the other hand, the need for this career progression was also important to educate the mindset of Malaysians to appreciate every single contributors towards the business. Kellogg America believes in respect for every individual regardless of hierarchy, grade, qualification and experience.

This technician career progression system was created to cater and suit the needs of Americans. It could

have been a success in America, however there is a difference in culture, society and politics between America and Malaysia. As this is fairly new in Malaysia, it has not been tested out prior to implementation. The career progression system was right away being carried out to ensure turnover will be reduced. The implementation was done in English without having concern on the level of understanding as the technicians in Malaysia are very used to the National Language Bahasa Melayu rather than English. Age is also a factor to be considered. In America when this career progression system was introduced, most of the workforce was in employment in average of 5 years. The seriousness of this system was conveyed in a different manner as the workforce was matured enough to understand the need of this system and the benefits they will gain. In Malaysia, the workforce is rather young as most of them are without working experience, so the level of seriousness may not be the same as they are not matured to understand the need of this career progression. Typically, younger generations tend to be motivated with short term satisfaction which is money rather than long term aim of moving up the career ladder. The end result is yet to be known. It will take time to set up everything and hopefully this will bring benefits to the individuals and the organization as a whole.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework depicts all the needed elements of this study. Based on the theory and the implemented technician career progression in Kellogg the framework has been designed to fit and suit this study. The conceptual framework does not test any relationship as it will be a qualitative study. The conceptual framework was designed based on the proposition that career progression is influenced by competencies and the outcomes have an impact on the technicians. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework for this study.

Methodology: This study will be conducted as a qualitative study focusing on organizations that have technicians who directly involved in the business. A comparison will be done among the organizations to Kellogg to benchmark the career progression system that is being implemented in other organizations. The respondents will be the human resource personnel to get a better understanding on the required competencies and selected technicians to gauge the meaning of career

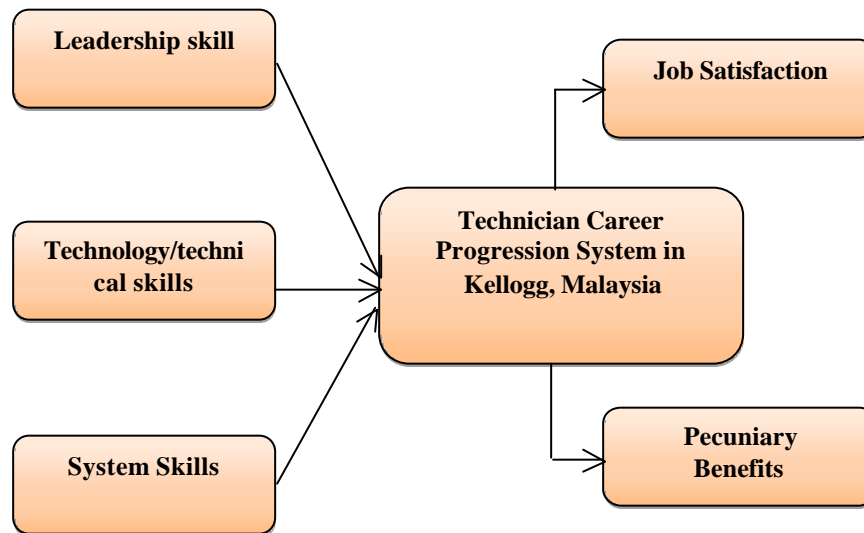


Fig. 1: Proosed conceptual framework

progression to them. A set of interview questions will be developed towards answering the research questions.

CONCLUSION

There are many competencies that contribute to career progression in general. Every Company has its own skills set to be fulfilled based on nature of business. Easier said than done, having a good career progression plan may not necessarily attract employee if the employee chooses to move on for a different reason which the Company is not able to provide. However, having a good career progression plan will be a good motivation and can lead to loyalty. It also shows that the organization is healthy in promoting good competition and values the employees' ability, capability and talent. Future studies could examine the relationships between the competencies and career progression system. There could be many method of career development outside of Malaysia that could be adopted for better management of talent. More studies should be conducted in the field of workers, technicians and lower level employees as to prove the need of these people in making a business progress.

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