

The Mediating Effects of Training Motivation on Assignment Methods and Transfer of Training: The Malaysian Context

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to examine the mediating effects of training motivation in the relationship between assignment methods and transfer of training using data gathered from survey questionnaires on military intermediate level officers in Malaysia. The statistical tool SmartPLS was employed to test the research hypotheses. The result indicated that training motivation was found to be an important mediator in the hypothesized relationship in Malaysian context. The study is significant particularly for training administration department and organizational managers directly related to training. Further, this study provides discussion, implications and conclusion.

Key words: Mandatory assignment, voluntary assignment, training transfer, training motivation, human resource management, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

In achieving organizational strategy and goals, training assignment is generally perceived as an important factor in training and transfer climate whereby it is believed to facilitate administrators in enhancing employees' competencies (Tsai and Tai, 2003). Essentially, training assignment has two methods: the first is mandatory assignment, a compulsory training assignment where employees are required to take a series of training programs. The second being voluntary assignment where employees may choose to attend training programs that are assigned to them (Azman *et al.*, 2013; Machin and Treloar, 2004) in other words, they have broader objectives. Administrators choose mandatory or voluntary assignment methods based on the contribution of training programs in fulfilling their organizational needs and expectations. More often than not mandatory assignment is used especially if administrators feel that the particular course is very important (e.g., related to core tasks and responsibilities) in upgrading employee capabilities to accomplish their organization vision and objectives (Machin and Treloar, 2004).

Recent studies revealed that the ability of administrators to successfully implement training assignment methods may evoke employees' training motivation (Ismail *et al.*, 2012; Machin and Treloar, 2004). Previous studies also argued that training motivation is one of the critical determinants of training effectiveness which in turn may help better transfer of training in the work place. Many scholars like, Machin and Treloar (2004) and Ismail *et al.* (2012) broadly define training motivation as individuals who have high inner drives (e.g., driven by clarity of goal, feeling of importance, self-efficacy, satisfaction and fairness) and this may strongly inspire them to acquire necessary knowledge and skills and picking up new skills, new abilities and develop positive attitudes in training programs. A further investigation of organizational training climate reveals that the association between administrators' training assignment methods and training motivation that may lead to an enhanced training transfer in organizations (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991). More recent researchers such as Ismail *et al.* (2012) and Abdullah *et al.* (2011), generally define training transfer as individuals who have high willingness to apply required

knowledge, contemporary skills, latest abilities and positive attitudes that they gained from training programs when returning into their organizations.

The association between training assignment methods, training motivation and training transfer is intriguing. However, the role of training motivation as an important mediating variable has never been given due emphasis in the workplace training program research literature (Baldwin *et al.*, 1991). It can be argued that this situation arises from the fact that many previous studies, places more emphasis on the characteristics of training assignment, therefore largely employing a simple correlation method as a means to evaluate respondent attitudes on particular training assignment styles and ignores to quantify the magnitude and nature of the relationships between training assignment and trainees outcomes in organizations. Consequently, these studies have presented inadequate empirical evidence and thus may not help practitioners to clearly understand the difficulties of training assignment methods and formulate action plans in enhancing the effectiveness of training programs in a knowledge based organization (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991). Therefore, this situation motivates researchers to quantify the mediating effect of training motivation between training assignment and training transfer.

A quite number of researches were conducted through an indirect effect structure to examine training assignment in different locations. For example, the perceptions of 427 employees who had worked in a Sarawak local authority sector, 193 trainees in the engineering group of a manufacturing organization in United States (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991) and 207 trainees in an organization in United States (Baldwin *et al.*, 1991). These studies disclosed that the readiness of administrators to properly implement mandatory and voluntary assignments had strongly increased employees' motivation to acquire necessary knowledge, latest skills, new abilities and positive attitudes in the training programs. Interestingly, previous studies cited that readiness of training administrators provide adequate support to employees to attend the training programs and considered as the major determinant of training motivation in the organization (Tsai and Tai, 2003). As a result, this might lead to enhanced training transfer in different organizations (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991; Baldwin *et al.*, 1991).

This research literature supports the spirit of training motivation theory. For example, Adams (1963)' equity theory posits that fair treatment in distribution of outcomes may positively influence individual actions. Besides that Vroom (1964)'s expectancy theory explains

that individuals will perform their actions if they understand the value of outcomes. Application of these theories in a training model shows that the essence of these theories are to enhance fair treatment in managing training programs and place importance in training outcomes. For example, the ability of administrators to fairly treat employees and enhance employees understanding about the value of training programs through mandatory and voluntary assignments will strongly increase employees' motivation to attend training programs and learn. Consequently, it may lead to an enhanced training transfer in the workplace (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991; Baldwin *et al.*, 1991). Thus, it was hypothesized that:

- H₁: training motivation positively mediates the relationship between mandatory assignment and training transfer
- H₂: training motivation positively mediates the relationship between voluntary assignment and training transfer

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed survey method in order to collect data from a large armed forces training center in Malaysia. The preliminary questionnaire was drafted based on the previous literature on training assignment, training motivation and transfer of training. To test its efficacy, the draft was tested on five experienced military officers including training staff officer, instructor, company commander and platoon commander at units and training center. The constructive inputs were sought to verify both the content validity and the format of survey questionnaire for the actual study. Subsequently, a 'back translation' technique was employed to convert and transform the survey questions into English and Malay versions in order to increase validity of the research findings (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010).

The survey questionnaire consists of three major parts. The first part is mandatory Training Assignment (TA) having four items and Voluntary training Assignment (VA) with three items that were adapted from training assignment literature (Machin and Treloar, 2004). Second part of the questionnaire is Training Motivation (TM) with twelve items that were modified and adapted from training motivation literature (Baldwin *et al.*, 1991; Azman *et al.*, 2013). Finally, the last part of questionnaire is Transfer of Training (TT) which includes ten items that were also adapted and modified from previous training literature (Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Baldwin and Magjuka,

1991). All of the questions in the questionnaire were given a 7-point Likert's scale ranging from '1' represents 'strongly disagree/dissatisfied' to '7' represents 'strongly agree/satisfied'. Demographic information was used as a control item because this research concentrated on intermediate level army officer only.

Using the convenient sampling technique, the questionnaires were distributed to 200 intermediate level armed forces officers at various units in the infantry corp including one armed forces training establishment. Out of the distributed questionnaire, researchers received 92 usable responses, representing 46% response rate for further analysis. In addition, the SmartPLS path modeling as recommended by prominent management scholars (Henseler *et al.*, 2009) was used for the analysis including to measure the reliability and validity of the instruments and to test the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS

Majority of respondents' demographics in this study were those from platoon commanders (54%), aged from 21-25 years (35%), married officers (55.4%), degree holders (54.3%), served <5 years (50%) and worked at infantry battalion (73.9%).

The results of confirmatory factor analysis of this study were shown in Table 1 and 2. Table 1 shows results of loadings of the constructs and reliability. The loading factor has to be >0.7 to be considered adequate for the factor loadings (Chin, 2001). All constructs have values of

AVE >0.5 which indicate that they have fulfilled the acceptable level of convergent validity (Barclay *et al.*, 1995). The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha have values bigger than 0.8 which indicate that the measurement used in this study has high internal consistency (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). To conclude, the reliability and validity of measurement model in this study meets the criteria as suggested in the literature.

Table 2 shows that all constructs have the values of square root of AVE in diagonal are higher than the squared correlation with other constructs in off diagonal. It shows that all constructs in this study have fulfilled the discriminant validity acceptable level (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

The mean, standard deviation and the results of Pearson correlation analysis are shown in Table 3. The mean values for the constructs are from 5.29-6.08, signifying that the levels of MA, VA, TM and TT ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). With regard to the correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (MA and TA) and the mediating variable TM) and the relationship between the mediating variable TM) and the dependent variable (TT) were <0.90 indicating that the data were not affected by serious collinearity problem (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

Figure 1 presents the result of mediating effect by Training Motivation construct (TM) using SmartPLS path model. To indicate the overall predictive strength of the model, the value of R² is utilized. The R² value is interpreted as follows: 0.19 (weak), 0.33 (moderate) and 0.67 (substantial) (Chin, 2001). This figure presents that

Table 1: Result of factor loading and reliability test

| Constructs | No. of items | Cross factor loadings | AVE | Composite reliability | Cronbachs alpha |
|------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| MA | 4 | 0.7653-0.8450 | 0.653452 | 0.882791 | 0.825026 |
| VA | 3 | 0.9157-0.9686 | 0.894833 | 0.962281 | 0.940939 |
| TM | 12 | 0.7566-0.8652 | 0.630097 | 0.953280 | 0.946412 |
| TT | 10 | 0.7544-0.8950 | 0.653529 | 0.949510 | 0.940867 |

Table 2: Fornell-larcker criterion test

| Constructs | AVE | MA | VA | TM | TT |
|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------|
| MA | 0.653452 | 0.808400 | - | - | - |
| VA | 0.894833 | 0.741904 | 0.945900 | - | - |
| TM | 0.630097 | 0.424793 | 0.547857 | 0.793800 | - |
| TT | 0.653529 | 0.601227 | 0.551981 | 0.543300 | 0.8084 |

Square root of AVE shows in diagonal

Table 3: Analysis of the constructs

| Construct | Mean | SD | Pearson correlation analysis | | | |
|-----------|------|------|------------------------------|--------|--------|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| MA | 5.81 | 0.63 | 1.00 | - | - | - |
| VA | 5.89 | 0.77 | 0.75** | 1.00 | - | - |
| TM | 6.08 | 0.56 | 0.41** | 0.54** | 1.00 | - |
| TT | 5.29 | 0.51 | 0.59** | 0.55** | 0.53** | 1 |

Significant at *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.000 reliability estimation is shown in a diagonal

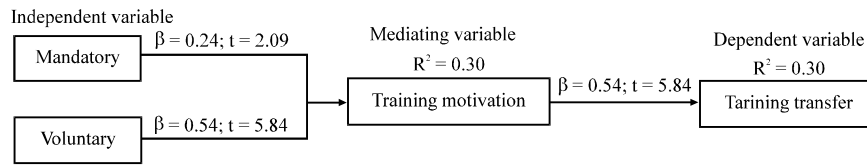


Fig. 1: The outcomes of SmartPLS path model analysis; significant at * $t > 1.96$; ** $t > 2.58$; *** $t > 3.29$

the inclusion of MA, VA and TM in the analysis had explained 30% of the variance in dependent variable. Specifically, the results of testing research hypothesis revealed that association between administrators' training assignment methods (MA and VA) and training motivation was significantly related with training transfer ($\beta = 0.54$; $t = 5.84$), therefore H_1 and H_2 were supported. This result confirms that training motivation has mediated the effect of administrators' training assignment methods on training transfer in the studied organization.

The Global Fit measure (GoF) based on Wetzels *et al.* (2009) guideline was carried out to determine whether the PLS path model has a global fit. The formula is as follows: $GoF = \sqrt{MEAN(Communality\ of\ Endogenous) \times MEAN(R^2)} = 0.46$, demonstrating that it exceeds the cut-off value of 0.36 for large effect sizes of R^2 . The result of the analysis confirms that the PLS path model has better explanatory power in comparison with the baseline values (GoF small = 0.1, GoF medium = 0.25, GoF large = 0.36). It also provides adequate support to validate the PLS Model globally (Wetzels *et al.*, 2009).

DISCUSSION

Most of the studies on training assignment in the literature were related to the Western context and the results may not reflect with the studies conducted in Asian context. Thus, the present study in Malaysian context is expected to enrich the training assignment literature in general. This study is certainly important especially in the era of competitive business environment because employee training is often considered as the most essential strategic tool for the organizations which enhance employees' knowledge, skills and ability needed to meet the job related challenges. In this regard, employees' motivation for training plays such an important role in achieving training objectives which in turn, may provide better transfer of training.

The finding of the study has supported the proposed hypothesis that training motivation plays an important role as mediator in the studied relationship, i.e., assignment methods and transfer of training relationship. The implications of this study can be divided into three categories: theoretical aspect, robustness of research methodology and finally practical contribution of the

study. Theoretically, the study revealed that training motivation mediated both mandatory and voluntary training assignments on the effectiveness of training transfer. The result supported the previous findings by Baldwin and Magjuka (1991). While explaining the issue of training motivation, the previous studies argued that the individual (employee) training motivation is expected to be higher if the training assignment is mandatory in nature, thus no choice is given to employees from organizational part, rather than it is voluntary initiative from employees' part.

It is also noted that the mandatory training program is usually perceived as the commitment of the organization emphasizing new knowledge and skills development, employees will likely to be highly motivated to participate the training program in true sense. In other words, the research evidence showed that training motivation will generally be enhanced if employees feel training program is beneficial or necessary for both parties, i.e., employees and organization. In fact, past studies have also suggested that top management in some occasion should force employees to attend some specific training program to ensure organizational objectives are achieved (Baldwin and Magjuka, 1991). Therefore, the theoretical contribution of this study has enriched the literature in the human resource management.

As far as the methodological issue is concerned, the research instruments have satisfied the requirements of validity and reliability of the analysis which is necessary condition for reliable research findings. Finally, in terms of practical contribution of the study, the result may certainly be helpful for those who are directly involved with the administration of training programs in the organization. In light of this, a number of improvement guidelines are proposed. Firstly, the result may be used to improve the administration of training program. The training administrators should practice communication openness and disseminate information clearly among the employees in order to create awareness about the importance of the training program. Secondly, training administrators should implement transformational leadership style to explore, identify and develop employee potentials for future careers. Thirdly, administrators should provide positive support in order to encourage the

application of new competencies into the workplace. In this matter, managers should appreciate, retain, motivate and reward employees having higher rate of transfer of training and this is only possible when employees embrace the various benefits of attending the training program. There are evidences in the literature that the context of the research is highly important and in most cases the findings of the studies also vary. The interesting fact is that even though the context of this study is different from those studies conducted in Western countries, however, the results are found to be consistent. Thus, the suggestions offered in the study may motivate both administrators and employees to achieve the ultimate purpose of training programs in their organization.

CONCLUSION

There are plethora of evidences in the past literature that the association among training assignment methods, training motivation and transfer of training is important. However, the mediating effects of training motivation among the relationship has been given less emphasis. The study has attempted to test the conceptual framework which was developed based on previous literature on employee training in the workplace. To be more specific, this study has examined the mediating effects of training motivation on the relationship between assignment methods and transfer of training in Malaysian context. In the training literature, it has been found that training motivation is one of the most critical for training effectiveness and transfer of training.

The results fully supported our proposed hypotheses by revealing the mediating effects on the hypothesized relationship among the military officers in Malaysia. Thus, the study has extended the literature on training management in Asian context. The training administrators, top management and the policy makers may find this study result unique and they can incorporate training motivation as the key element while designing training events for the employees. This study also suggests the administrators' capability of providing adequate support to trainees, talented trainers, giving appropriate assignments and the delivery modes will strongly increase the training motivation, thus better learning and higher transfer of training as well.

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