



International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research

ISSN : 0972-7302

available at <http://www.serialsjournal.com>

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Volume 15 • Number 4 • 2017

Human Resource Competencies and Human Resource Roles in Organization Practice

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ABSTRACT

Training and development is part of human resource function and can be considered as the core of organizational practice. Thus, training and development helps organizations to meet their vision, mission, and objective by equipping employees with skills and knowledge. In the context of organizational development, the combination of functions and roles in training and development will be oriented towards achieving the objectives of developing individual's potential, improving efficiency, and expanding productivity in organization. Therefore, this research aims to access the perceptions on the importance of competency and roles among Malaysian human resource development (HRD) practitioners. This study was conducted using a quantitative research design. Survey was used as an instrument to gather the data. The samples for this study were 144 Malaysian human resource practitioners who are involved directly in human resource. The findings are similar to what is reported in the literature review which identified the significant competencies and roles. In contrast, the perceived importance of competencies and roles are changing based on the respondent demographics and organizational culture. In conclusion, the research finding is meaningful for Malaysian organizations in terms of organizational development process.

Keywords: Competencies, Organizational performance, Human resource, Training and Development, Roles.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human resources traditional functions include recruitment, training, payroll, compensation, performance analysis, career development, and others. Training and development is part of human resource functions and can be considered as the core of organizational practice. Training and development functions include new employee orientation, leadership training, professional development and others. Thus, training and

development helps organizations to meet their vision, mission, and objective by equipping employees with skills and knowledge. As training and development evolve, the human resource functions also expand to make employees more productive. Therefore, human resource, training and development terms become more practical. Bashir and Jehanzeb (2013) described a perfect employee training and development program in organization must be a mixture of knowledge, skills, career development, and goal setting. Similarly, Bal, Bozkurt, and Ertensir (2013) stated that improving the competence of workforce through training and development activities is a way of creating a competitive advantage and also improve employees' current skills and prepare each employee for future responsibilities. Apart from that, human resource also has roles in execution its function. Roles represent a group of competencies targeted to meet specific expectations of a job or function (Rothwell, Sanders & Soper, 1999). In the context of organizational development, the combination of functions and roles will be oriented towards achieving the objectives of developing individual's potential, improving efficiency, and expanding productivity in organization.

Organizational development is an ongoing process of revision, re-organizing, and development that should be inherent to every organization. If the organizational development process is used systematically, an organization may be more likely to adapt to a new change and create its own organizational culture consistent with higher performance. Sherman (2004) suggested that organizations develop competencies to provide their employees with a framework that allows them to find opportunities to grow in their current assignment, thereby adding more value to the organizations. A competency is a capability of applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform specific task. According to Salleh and Sulaiman (2016), competencies consist of a description of the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity. Thus, this research aims to assess the perception of importance among Malaysian human resource development (HRD) practitioners, who belong to different human resource competency groups and play different roles.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCIES

In recent years, competencies have emerged as the primary means of organizations to evaluate the abilities and job skills of workers. However, there is no prior establishment of standard guidelines or universal job criterion that can be used across different countries to evaluate workers' knowledge and skills in the workforce. Competencies are a form of progress, as a tool, or point of reference, which can be used to assess and evaluate worker's performance. Moreover, competencies have become one of the review tools to evaluate workers' proficiencies in hard and soft skills. Several studies have been conducted to identify the impact of competencies in real jobs situations but with the different perspectives (Chen, 2003; Dewey, Montosse, Schroter, Sullins & Mattox, 2008; Morningstar, Kim, & Clark, 2008; Salleh, 2012; Meijers, Kuijpers, & Gundy, 2013). Some of the researchers studied the impact of competencies in organizational settings such as Chen, 2003; and Salleh, 2012; while others were in different settings. For example, Meijers, Kuijpers, and Gundy (2013) focused on the relationship between career competencies, career identity, motivation, and quality of choice. Dewey et. al., (2008) explored the overlaps and disconnects between the competencies evaluators acquired during graduate school, and those required and desired by employers. In contrast, Morningstar, Kim, and Clark (2008) evaluated transition competencies gained by secondary practitioners involved in a transition teacher education program.

In research scope, there have been widely differing arguments and expectations regarding competencies between academia and practitioners. Academia believes that academic programs offered in higher learning

institutions should focus on competency-based learning (Voorhees, 2001). Academia claims most programs offered in higher learning institutions have transitioned from a traditional teaching and learning approach to a focus on competency-based learning. According to Svensson, Ellstrom, and Aberg (2004), much of the knowledge and competence that organizations require and seek today can be found within the established educational system. Furthermore, educational programs are becoming outcome-oriented and curricula are being designed based on competencies (Sauber, Mc Surely, & Tummala, 2008). On the other side, practitioners claim the demand for competency-based learning comes from the new skill sets required by workers across industries. The work environment is rapidly changing due to a technology base that requires employers to hire competent workers. Nixon and Helms (2002) argued that technologies and alternative sources such as professionally designed materials, effective delivery, and tailored courses of education products allow for greater customization. To ensure that the organization performs, employers invest more on training development programs to train competent workers. Competencies are outcomes in the sense that workers are performed as a consequence of training or other learning activities or programs (Salleh & Sulaiman, 2016). Parallel to the organization's development, training will affect workers' competence and performance as well. Employees who experience training development at work show more career competence than employees who experience little or no training development (Kuijpers, Schyns & Scheerens, 2006).

In spite of various definitions of competency, the focus refers to an individual or worker's performance as related to organization performance in doing tasks or jobs. Competencies can be seen as sets of behaviors, which characterize better performance in every aspect of an individual. The individual's competencies are demonstrated in everyday tasks, jobs, roles, functions, and duties in an organization. Thus, competencies are the key elements of professional success needed to support and sustain a strategic plan, vision, mission, and goal of an organization (Hoevemeyer, 2006).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a quantitative research design with survey as an instrument to gather the data. The samples for this study were 144 Malaysian human resource practitioners who are involved directly in human resource. The respondents were drawn from various human resource development or human resource management-related associates in Malaysia. The survey instrument consists of a total of 3 constructs with 25 questionnaires. The distribution of survey instrument used an online delivery system known as Qualtrics. The instruments used five-point Likert scale to evaluate self-reported expertise and answer the questions. The level of measurement used five-point Likert scales: 1 = Less important now, Less important in five years; 2 = More important now, Less important in five years; 3 = Equivalent importance for now and in five years; 4 = Less important now, More important in five years; and 5 = More important now, More important in five years.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive statistics were performed and explored to assess data of Malaysian HRD practitioners' perceptions on the importance of competencies. Table 31.1 provides information for all respondents in this study regarding roles. The table also illustrates the ranks, means, and standard deviations by role. Rankings on perception on the importance of competencies were based on the mean values. *Examined by roles, which*

consisted of seven roles including Manager, Analyst, Intervention Selector, Intervention Designer/Developer, Intervention Implementor, Change Leader, and Evaluator the means ranged from 3.68 to 3.56.

Table 31.1
Malaysian HRD Practitioners' Perceptions on Importance of Competencies (n = 144)

<i>Category and/or Competency</i>	<i>Rank*</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>By Role</i>			
HRD Analyst	1	3.67	.94
Intervention Selector	2	3.67	.97
HRD Manager	5	3.65	.94
Change Leader	3	3.61	.93
Evaluator	4	3.58	.94
Intervention Implementor	6	3.57	.93
Intervention Designer/Developer	7	3.55	.90

*Note: Rank is based on the mean values

To investigate differences among the competencies in each of the three competency groups namely Organizational, Thinking, and Application competencies across the seven roles namely Manager, Analyst, Intervention Selector, Intervention Designer/Developer, Intervention Implementor, Change Leader, and Evaluator, a descriptive test was employed. Rothwell (2000) remarked that HRD practitioners enact seven distinct roles, that some HRD practitioners do certain roles in the context of their jobs, and that HRD practitioners will usually perform several roles at the same time. Table 31.2 shows the Roles of Malaysian HRD practitioners. It indicated that the most important *roles* in the organization, as pointed out by the respondents, are HRD Manager (25.3%). In contrast, Table 31.3 shows the number of roles of Malaysian HRD practitioners. To run the statistical analysis, respondents who were identified with one primary role (n = 68) were selected. Respondents with more than one role were excluded from this analysis because it would interfere with the purpose of this analysis.

Table 31.2
Perceived WLP Role by Malaysian Human Resource Development Practitioners' (n = 144)

<i>Role</i>	<i>Responses (Multiple Choices)</i>		
	<i>Counts*</i>	<i>% of response</i>	<i>% of cases</i>
HRD Manager	93	22.8	64.6
HRD Analyst	75	18.4	52.1
Intervention Implementor	52	12.7	36.1
Evaluator	52	12.7	36.1
Intervention Selector	46	11.3	31.9
Change Leader	46	11.3	31.9
Intervention Designer/Developer	44	10.8	30.6
Total in Responses	408	100	

*Respondent were allowed to check more than one response

Table 31.3
Perceived Numbers of Roles by Malaysian Human Resource Development Practitioners' (n = 144)

<i>Numbers of role</i>	<i>Responses (Multiple Choices)</i>	
	<i>Counts*</i>	<i>% of response</i>
One role	68	47.2
Two roles	13	9.0
Three roles	16	11.1
Four roles	13	9.0
Five roles	7	4.9
Six roles	10	6.9
Seven roles	17	11.8
Total in Responses	144	100

*Respondent were allowed to check more than one response

Table 31.4 shows the frequency of roles by Malaysian HRD practitioners. Based on the frequencies, only the HRD Manager and HRD Analyst can be compared to the Organizational, Thinking, and Application competencies. Other roles showed too few of an *n* to be compared with each other.

Table 31.4
Frequency and Percentage of Malaysian Human Resource Development Practitioners' Who Identified One Role (n = 144)

<i>Role</i>	<i>Responses (Multiple Choices)</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
HRD Manager	30	20.8
HRD Analyst	23	16.0
Intervention Implementor	5	3.5
Evaluator	3	2.1
Intervention Selector	4	2.8
Change Leader	3	2.1
Intervention Designer/Developer	-	-
Total in Responses	68	47.2

*Respondent were allowed to check more than one response

An Independent Sample t-test was used to investigate the difference among the HRD Manager and HRD Analyst in the Organizational competencies, Thinking competencies, and Application competencies. Data for the *t*-test was presented and divided into Organizational Competencies, Thinking Competencies, and Application Competencies. Table 5 shows the Independent *t*-test results for Organizational competencies. Independent Sample *t*-test results revealed that each of the other nine competencies in the Organizational competencies group were not significantly different between the HRD Manager and HRD Analyst except for communication. The *t*-test result showed that the HRD Manager was significantly different from the HRD Analyst on communication, ($p = .013$). Inspection of the two group means indicated that the average HRD Analyst data for communication ($M = 4.48$) was significantly higher than the data for HRD Manager ($M = 3.80$). The difference between means was .68 and the effect size *d* was approximately .71, which was larger than typical.

Table 31.5
Independent *t*-test result of Organizational Competencies between HRD Manager and HRD Analyst

Category and/or Competency	HRD Manager (<i>n</i> = 30)		HRD Analyst (<i>n</i> = 23)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> *
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>By Organizational competencies</i>							
Communication	3.80	1.00	4.48	.90	-2.56	.013	.71
Systems Thinking	3.73	.94	4.17	.89	-1.73	.090	.48
Consulting	3.60	.89	3.96	.93	-1.42	.163	.40
Identification of Critical Business Issues	3.80	.93	3.52	.85	1.13	.265	.31
Negotiating/Contracting	3.67	.92	3.91	.90	-.97	.335	.26
Visioning	3.87	.86	4.04	1.07	-.67	.507	.18
Goal Implementation	3.73	1.05	3.91	1.00	-.63	.530	.18
Buy-in/Advocacy	3.70	.84	3.83	.83	-.54	.588	.15
Group Dynamics	3.40	.93	3.26	.92	.54	.590	.15
Work Environment Analysis	3.73	.83	3.78	.67	-.23	.817	.07

**d* ≥ 1.00 ; Much larger than typical
 > .80; Larger or larger than typical
 > .50; Medium or typical
 > .20; Small or smaller than typical

Table 31.6 shows the Independent *t*-test result for Thinking competencies. An Independent Sample *t*-test result revealed that each of nine competencies in the Thinking competencies group was not significantly different between the HRD Manager and HRD Analyst except for analytical thinking. The *t*-test result showed that the HRD Manager was significantly different from the HRD Analyst on analytical thinking (*p* = .042). Inspection of the two group means indicated that the average HRD Analyst data for communication (*M* = 4.00) was significantly higher than the data for HRD Manager (*M* = 3.47). The difference between means was .53 and the effect size *d* was approximately .57, which was medium.

Table 31.6
Independent *t*-test Result of Thinking Competencies between HRD Manager and HRD Analyst

Category and/or Competency	HRD Manager (<i>n</i> = 30)		HRD Analyst (<i>n</i> = 23)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> *
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>By Thinking competencies</i>							
Analytical Thinking	3.47	.94	4.00	.91	-2.08	.042	.57
Questioning	3.50	.97	3.87	1.10	-1.30	.201	.36
Facilitation	3.73	.87	4.04	.93	-1.25	.217	.34
Workplace Performance, Learning Strategies, and Intervention Evaluation	3.77	.90	4.04	.93	-1.10	.278	.30
Standard Identification	3.57	.97	3.87	1.06	-1.08	.284	.30
Leadership	3.77	.97	4.04	.93	-1.05	.300	.28
Model Building	3.53	.94	3.74	1.01	-.77	.447	.22
Competency Identification	3.63	1.16	3.87	1.29	-.70	.487	.20

**d* ≥ 1.00 ; Much larger than typical
 > .80; Larger or larger than typical
 > .50; Medium or typical
 > .20; Small or smaller than typical

Table 31.7 showed the Independent *t*-test result for Application competencies. An Independent Sample *t*-test result revealed that none of the competencies in the Application Competencies group were significantly different between the HRD Manager and HRD Analyst. The *t*-test result showed the HRD Manager was not significantly different from the HRD Analyst on process consultation ($p = .148$). Inspection of two group means indicated that the HRD Analyst average data for communication ($M = 4.09$) was significantly higher than data of the HRD Manager ($M = 3.70$). The difference between means was .39 and the effect size *d* was approximately .41, which was small.

Table 31.7
Independent *t*-test Result of Application Competencies between HRD Manager and HRD Analyst

Category and/or Competency	HRD Manager ($n = 30$)		HRD Analyst ($n = 23$)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> *
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>By Application competencies</i>							
Process Consultation	3.70	.92	4.09	1.00	-1.47	.148	.41
Organization Development Theory and Application	3.50	.86	3.35	.71	.69	.496	.19
Training Theory and Application	3.50	1.17	3.39	1.20	.33	.741	.09
Feedback	3.67	.84	3.74	1.01	-.28	.777	.07
Reward system theory and Application	3.90	1.13	3.96	1.26	-.17	.864	.05
Staff Selection Theory and Application	3.47	1.04	3.52	1.41	-.16	.871	.04
Career Development Theory and Application	4.13	.97	4.13	.87	.01	.991	0

* $d \geq 1.00$; Much larger than typical
 > .80; Larger or larger than typical
 > .50; Medium or typical
 > .20; Small or smaller than typical

This question sought to find answers to the question of how Malaysian HRD practitioners, who belong to different competency groups and play different roles, perceive importance. It is important in this research to view the competencies based on role categories because the roles of employees are different based on the field. According to Rothwell (2002), WLP practitioners enact seven distinct roles, some WLP practitioners will only perform certain roles in the context of their jobs, and most WLP practitioners will usually perform several roles at the same time. Similarly, Rothwell et. al., (1999) suggested that changing roles in the field are important as indicators or changing expectations. In WLP research, the concepts of roles are progressively changing due to organizational development and HRD progress. This progression has been translated into an HRD competency model where the function of roles are more defined and become a successful execution factor. Bernthal et. al., (2004) remarked that roles are broad areas of responsibility within the WLP profession that require a certain combination of competencies. Understanding the relationship among roles and how they fit into the specific competencies will allow HRD practitioners to focus on the specific competencies they need for their organizations. Rothwell and Sredl (1992) explained that competency studies could help to clarify the range of roles that may be played and that the competencies are associated with successful practice.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis in this study did support some of the findings reported in the literature review regarding competencies needed by the employees in an organization. This study reported some findings

that are meaningful for Malaysian organizations in terms of organizational development process. In an organizational context, competencies are arguably often perceived to be a process of learning for individuals, knowledge, and support for HRD practitioners, and development for organizational performance. Thus, within the organizational context, change is a process that occurs in organizations, and for the most part, unplanned and gradual.

Acknowledgements

Thank you and gratitude to Office for Research, Innovation, Commercialization and Consultancy Management, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) for the support given in making this study a success.

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