

COMPETENCIES AMONG HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS ACCORDING TO DISCIPLINES AND LEVELS IN MALAYSIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: Malaysia is shifting from its current practices in human resources of training and development, to become more aware of trends in workforce competencies and their positive social and economic impacts. The lack of well-trained, experienced, and competent workers in job market create a gap between various levels and discipline in organization. It is a key factor that drives between success and failure in the organization performance. Hence, organizations are more aware of how to align worker's skills with the tasks given to ensure that they are competent to undertake the job effectively. The new trend in workplace is to transform workers knowledge, expertise, and skills to prepare them to be more competent employees and better suited to the job market. Thus, this study examines the differences between human resource development discipline and human resource development level, in regards to the competency group in Malaysian organization. The findings of this study indicated that the Malaysian Human Resource Development practitioners perceived that competencies are important to the organization. However, this study found no significant difference between human resource development disciplines and human resource development levels in three competency groups. The results from this study have provided evidence that the competencies are keys for organizational performance.

Keywords: Competencies, Organizational performance, Human resource, Competency model, Workplace learning and performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is moving towards to become high income economy nation by 2020. To achieve this vision, organizations in Malaysia need to provide highly competent workers in workplace and job market. The situation is forcing Malaysia to shift from its current practices in human resources of training and development, to become more aware of trends in workforce competencies and the positive social and economic impacts. The new trend in

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workplace is to transform workers knowledge, expertise, and skills to prepare them to be more competent employees and better suited to the job market. To work effectively and meet the requirements of jobs and organizations, workers must combine knowledge, skills, and other work-related capacities into specific competences actually needed (Loogma, 2004).

The lack of well-trained, experienced, and competent workers in job market create a gap between various levels and discipline in organization. It is a key factor that drives between success and failure in the organization performance. Hence, organizations are more aware of how to align worker's skills with the tasks given to ensure that they are competent to undertake the job effectively. Organizations require higher competency levels of knowledge and skills that respond to the specific requirements within professional practices (Sauber, McSurely, & Tummala, 2008). Similarly, Salleh, Sulaiman, and Gloeckner (2015) argued the demand for competent workers in workplace require employees to develop and improve their competencies and work abilities. Therefore, competencies should be incorporated within the workplace to promote competition among employees and improve productivity within organizations. Even though organizations used a different competency model in practice, the outcome shows that workers' competency contributes to an organization's performance. In viewing the competencies, organizations can be more successful if they know how to integrate competencies throughout all aspects of workers' jobs, including career development, professional development, and performance management. An increased need for improved performance and intervention requires more efficient ways to identify, recruit, measure, and improve the competencies of the workforce and in human resource practices.

2. HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

In general, human resource is divided into two categories containing human resource development and human resource management. Some researchers (Siikaniemi, 2009) distinguish between human resource development and human resource management. In contrast, other researchers (Haslinda, 2009) place the human resource management under the umbrella of human resource development. In many cases, the different definition can be helpful in terms of segregating the function. Human resource management is defined as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets; the people working there whom individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objective (Armstrong, 2006).

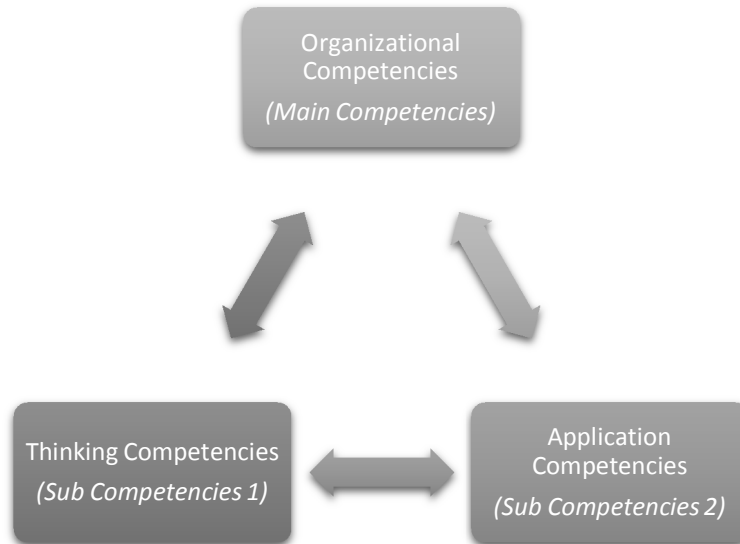
McLagan (1989) defined human resource development as an integrated use of training and development, organization development, and career development to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness. With the same perspective, Smith (2004) points out that human resource development is concerned with enhancing the work-related knowledge, skills, and capability of people working as individuals, in teams, and in organizations. While others agree that workplace performance is the defining paradigm for human resource development and they encourage learning as a defining paradigm for the field (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Salleh, 2012). Human resource development improves performance through the integrated use of three major practice areas: training and development, career development, and organization development. This means that the workers need to develop an ability to transfer their knowledge and skills from one situation to another (Trim, 2003). Therefore, the workers or individuals need to develop an ability to transfer what they have learned from one situation to another situation.

Furthermore, the human resource development also focuses on training and development. As seen in many cases in organizations, training and development focus on the progress of the individual, primarily through planned learning experiences. In the past, formal classroom training programs comprised the majority of human resource development activities and the terms “training” and “development” were often used synonymously. At present, human resource development has evolved to a broader focus on improving workplace learning and performance by developing human potential. Human resource development is moving away from a process identity, which defined the field by a single intervention tool and delivery mechanism for training, to an outcome identity employing a broad tool kit of performance enhancing interventions and strategies. Formal classroom training is declining in importance as human resource development is pressured to respond to the new workplace with more effective and efficient tools. One of the tools that can be used to address the relationship between HRD with individuals and organizations’ performance is competencies. Heffernan and Flood (2000) claimed that competencies could potentially be used to integrate and link an organization’s main HR process such as recruitment, training and development, performance management and rewards with the organization business strategy.

To encourage and facilitate HRD in organizations, human performance improvement (HPI) has been developed. HPI is a process to analyze human

performance in organizations. According to Rothwell, Sanders, and Soper (1999), HPI is the systematic process of discovering and analyzing important human performance gaps, planning for future improvements in human performance, designing and developing cost-effective and ethically justifiable interventions to close performance gaps. Workplace learning and performance (WLP) replaced HPI and captured attention because HRD activities, such as training and development, moved and were replaced by ways to fulfill results. Additionally, the shift from HRD to WLP was also to accomplish competitiveness through knowledge. Rothwell, Sanders, and Soper (1999) remarks that WLP is the integrated use of learning and other interventions for the purpose of improving individual and organizational performance.

Workplace learning and performance (WLP) can be viewed from the perspective of learning as improvement tools. In the organizational context, WLP happens for the purpose of balancing between improving workers and organization performance. According to Rothwell (2002), WLP is the new name for the field once called Training and Development (T&D), Human Resource Development (HRD), and Human Performance Improvement (HPI). WLP was designed to stimulate a shift toward bridging the gap between activity and results. It used the WLP competency model to realign the competency needed by workers with the organizations expectations. In organization setting, competency model can be viewed as a guideline for better improvement. In this study, the competency model used is competency model for HRD practitioners in Malaysia by Salleh (2012). Figure 1 shows the relationships among various processes in the competency model for HRD practitioners in Malaysia. Sherman (2004) remarks that in the organization, competency model looks at the role of an individual. The Malaysian HRD Competencies Model shows the relationship between Main Competencies and two Sub Competencies groups. The three competency groups are skill sets acquired by the practitioners. Organizational competencies are more about comprehension, articulation, and a combination of skill, attitudes, knowledge, and employee behavior needed in an organization. Conversely, thinking competencies are more related to skill and knowledge. Thinking competencies are most effective in support long-term planning in regards to the employees' professional and career development process in an organization. Application competencies are more about attitudes and behavior.

Figure 1 Competency Model for Malaysian HRD Practitioners (Salleh, 2012)

3. METHODOLOGY

The research design of this non-experimental study is descriptive and inferential in nature. Using this methodology, differential analysis seeks to examine whether or not there is a differences between HRD discipline and HRD levels, in regard to competency groups. The target population for this study was Malaysian human resource practitioners. From the target population, the sample was calculated. The number of samples was based on a sample size table and the response rate. Then, the survey instrument distributed used an online delivery system known as Qualtrics. Advance e-mails to the participants explaining the purpose of the study and the reminders were also sent. Data for this study were collected from HRD practitioners from various organizations in Malaysia who successfully completed the web-based survey. A total of 172 respondents took the survey, from the total respondents, 28 were incomplete surveys and 144 were completed and further analyzed. The first stage of the analysis is Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and also descriptive statistical analysis. Then, a Factorial Analysis of Variance (Factorial ANOVA) compared means between HRD disciplines and HRD levels in terms of competency groups.

4. FINDINGS

The respondents in this study were Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners in Malaysia. Descriptive statistical analysis including

frequencies and percentages were used to analyze and interpret the data as shown in Table 1. The primary discipline of the respondents was Human Resource Management. It showed that 40.3 percent of the respondents were in the Human Resource Management discipline, and 59.7 percent of respondents were in all other areas. The demographics indicated that most of the respondents were at a Manager level in their organizations.

Table 1.
Demographic profile of Malaysian Human Resource Practitioners (n = 144)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Discipline			2. Level in Organization		
Human Resource Management	58	40.3	Manager	62	43.1
Career Development	19	13.2	Executive	33	22.9
Organization Development	19	13.2	Supervisor	25	17.4
Generalist	15	10.4	Entry	14	9.7
Management Development	14	9.7	Private Consultant	7	4.9
Training	14	9.7	Other	3	2.1
Other	5	3.5	Total	144	100
Total	144	100			

To do the analysis for the data, descriptive statistics were applied to check the frequency and percentage of the respondents. Factorial Analysis of Variance (Factorial ANOVA) then was employed to compare the mean importance scores for each competency by discipline and level. Data in Table 2 revealed Malaysian HRD practitioners frequencies count by discipline. *Organization performance* was the combination of various disciplines including *Training*, *Organization Development*, *Management Development*, *Career Development*, *Generalist*, and *Other*. The data illustrated that, by frequency counts, most respondents in this study were from *Organization Performance* ($n = 86$) representing 59.7 percent while *Human Resource Management* ($n = 58$) represented 40.3 percent from the total population.

Table 2.
Malaysian Human Resource Development Practitioners' by Discipline (n = 144)

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Human Resource Management	58	40.3
Organization Performance	86	59.7
Total	144	100

Table 3 presents the frequency counts of HRD practitioners by *Level*. The levels were grouped into three categories including: Top Level Managers,

Middle level Managers, and Other. *Top Level Managers* represent executive and managers, *Middle Level Managers* represent supervisor and entry-level, while *Other* represents private consultant and other levels. It was indicated that the most frequent respondents for this study were *Top Level Manager* ($n = 95$), representing 66.0 percent, while *Middle Level Managers* ($n = 39$) were the second highest respondents with 27.0 percent of the population.

Table 3
Malaysian HRD Practitioners' by Level, Frequency and Percentage (n = 144)

<i>Level</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Top Level Managers	95	66.0
Middle Level Managers	39	27.0
Other	10	7.0
Total	144	100

Factorial ANOVA for *Organizational Competencies* was conducted. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was conducted to test the assumption for equality of variances. Levene's test indicated the equality of variances for the groups of independent variables on the dependent variable (Field, 2000). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The assumption of normal distributions of the dependent for each group was not violated. Table 4 shows the number of subjects, the mean, and standard deviation of *Organizational Competencies* for each cell. Table 5 revealed that the Factorial ANOVA results for *Organizational Competencies* were not significant, meaning that the test met the equal variance assumption. Post hoc was not necessary because there were no significant differences between discipline and level of HRD practitioners with all variances.

Table 4.
Organizational Competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

<i>Level</i>	<i>Disciplines</i>						<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Human Resource Management</i>			<i>Organization Performance</i>				
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Top Level Managers	43	3.69	.73	52	3.71	.61	3.70	.66
Middle Level Managers	12	3.58	.54	27	3.54	.57	3.55	.55
Other	3	3.47	.45	7	3.67	.96	3.61	.82
Total	58	3.65	.68	86	3.65	.63	3.65	.65

Table 5
Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Organizational Competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

<i>Variable and source</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>η²</i>	<i>eta</i>
Organizational Competencies					
Discipline	1	.060	.141	.001	.032
Level	2	.278	.652	.009	.095
Discipline*Level	2	.048	.113	.002	.044
Error	138	.427			

Factorial ANOVA for *Thinking Competencies* was conducted. Table 6 shows the number of subjects, the means, and standard deviations of *Thinking Competencies* for each cell. Table 7 revealed that the Factorial ANOVA results for *Thinking Competencies* were not significant, meaning that the test met the equal variance assumption. Post hoc was not necessary because there were no significant differences between discipline and level of HRD practitioners with all variances.

Table 6
Thinking competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

<i>Level</i>	<i>Disciplines</i>						<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Human Resource Management</i>			<i>Organization Performance</i>				
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Top Level Managers	43	3.73	.73	52	3.73	.72	3.73	.72
Middle Level Managers	12	3.89	.68	27	3.56	.60	3.66	.63
Other	3	3.50	.76	7	3.43	.78	3.45	.73
Total	58	3.75	.71	86	3.65	.69	3.69	.70

Table 7.
Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Thinking Competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

<i>Variable and source</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>η²</i>	<i>eta</i>
Thinking Competencies					
Discipline	1	.257	.523	.004	.063
Level	2	.275	.559	.008	.089
Discipline*Level	2	.326	.663	.010	.100
Error	138	.492			

Factorial ANOVA for *Application Competencies* was conducted. Table 8 shows the number of subjects, the means, and standard deviations of *Application Competencies* for each cell. Table 9 revealed that the Factorial ANOVA results for *Sub Competencies 2* were not significant, meaning that the test met the equal variance assumption. Post hoc was not necessary because there were no significant differences between discipline and level of HRD practitioners with all variances.

Table 8
Application Competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

Level	Disciplines						Total	
	Human Resource Management			Organization Performance			M	SD
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
Top Level Managers	43	3.55	.82	52	3.76	.71	3.66	.77
Middle Level Managers	12	3.80	.73	27	3.68	.72	3.72	.72
Other	3	3.19	.58	7	3.98	.79	3.74	.79
Total	58	3.58	.79	86	3.75	.72	3.68	.75

Table 9
Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Application Competencies as a Function of Discipline and Level

Variable and source	df	MS	F	η^2	eta
Application Competencies					
Discipline	1	1.223	2.165	.014	.118
Level	2	.125	.222	.003	.055
Discipline*Level	2	.759	1.343	.019	.138
Error	138	.565			

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that Malaysian HRD practitioners perceived that competencies are important to the organization. However, this study found no significant difference between HRD disciplines and HRD levels in three competency groups. The analysis revealed that even though studies in others countries found significant differences, it does not mean that the same pattern would be found in Malaysia. The findings showed that competencies in organizations and other countries are not static, but rather dynamic. This

is consistent with the literature review, which suggests that competencies are a development process. Rothwell, Sander, and Soper (1999) remarked that competencies not only vary by discipline, industry, and organization, but changes in the general marketplace will inevitably change the importance of competencies and roles needed to meet this new reality. In contrast, Bernthal et al. (2004) pointed out that globalization is one of the factors that shape businesses and organizations. Globalization can create diverse environments in organizations. Thus, with the impact of globalization, organizations are exposed to cross-cultural contact and more competitive global markets, which demand competent and diverse workers. Salleh, Sulaiman, and Talib (2010) advocate that employers need to prepare the organization to ensure that workers meet their needs in order to face globalization. Organizations operating abroad might need to break out of their own paradigm and make a point to understand the cultural issues that could lead to low productivity and labor strife, resulting from a lack of motivation of culturally diverse populations (Bernthal et al., 2004).

The organizations and HRD practitioners should better understand customs, cultures, and languages of the employees. Sherman (2004) argued that culture influences the selection of individuals for particular jobs and locations, which in turn affects the way in which tasks are carried out and decisions are made. HRD practitioners are not only accountable for a better understanding of the organization's culture, but also for a better understanding of the Malaysian culture. Burke (2008) emphasized organization culture by saying culture is "the way we do things around here" and concerns deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and values. Additionally, Schein (1985) proposed that there are several cultures operating within an organization; a managerial culture, various occupationally based cultures in functional units, group cultures based on geographical proximity, worker cultures based on shared hierarchical experiences, and so on. Clearly, with so many cultures involved in an organization, various competencies are needed to handle different situations. Organization performance is becoming dependent on how organizational change reflects organization culture. HRD practitioners need good communication skills to deliver and educate employees in an organizational culture.

The findings also revealed that competencies are a key to aligning human resource development with organization performance. Sherman (2004) indicated that competencies are the combination of knowledge, abilities, personal attributes, and skills that contribute to individual and organizational performance. Organizations that operate in highly competitive environments must be flexible and able to react quickly to market changes, such as demand for competent and knowledgeable workers.

It is vital for HRD practitioners to allocate time, energy, and resources to plan for the organization development process and implementation of competency in organizations. Cummings and Worley (2005) saw organization development as a process that applies behavioral science knowledge and practices to help organizations build the capacity to change and to achieve greater effectiveness, including increased financial performance and improved quality of work life. Additionally, Salleh, Sulaiman, and Gloeckner (2015) asserted organization development is an ongoing process of revision, re-organizing, and development that should be inherent to every organization. Thus, an organization development process will help HRD practitioners to the performance of organization by determining the changing process and keeping track of necessary improvements.

This study supports the idea that competencies are keys for organizational performance. Based on the findings of the study, many conclusions can be drawn. While the research did not reveal many relationships of statistical significance, the practical implications are many. The findings suggest that competencies have an implication for the organizational development process. Competencies can improve organizational development and performance when collectively implemented by the organization. Additionally, this study provided clarification that competencies need to have a direction and foundation in the workplace. In contrast, the lack of clarity and understanding about competencies makes HRD practitioners unable to determine which competencies are perceived important for the workers in the organization.

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