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Continued Professional Development Practices in Malaysian Service-Based Industry

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Continued Professional Development (CPD) through continuous learning calls upon organisations to encourage, support, and provide favourable environment for employees to engage in continuous learning. This will help to avoid 'professional obsolete syndrome'; a syndrome faced by a majority if not all employees. This study intends to investigate the current practices of CPD in the Malaysian service-based industry. This article presents the results of an analysis of CPD practices using a qualitative approach based on several interviews with subject-matter-experts from various sectors in the Malaysian service-based industry. Fifteen HR Directors and HR Managers were interviewed in order to gauge their perspectives on the current practices of CPD as this will depict the actual scenario on how they see; interpret; regulate; implement; and enforce CPD for staffs' development. The data which was collected via interviews was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed different approaches or practices of CPD among several service sectors in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Continued Professional Development (CPD); Human Resource Management (HRM); Human Resource Development (HRD); Employee Competency; Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

There are five critical components in HRM that requires the attention of HR professionals namely staffing; HRD; compensation and benefits; employment and labour relations; and safety and health (Mondy et al., 2005; Snell & Bohlander, 2013; Dessler, 2008; Maimunah, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 2003). HRD is an approach that focuses on developing manpower, knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) which would help to achieve organizational goals (Mahathir, 2005; Umar, 2005; Tomé, 2011). HRD commitment towards enhancing competencies relies on employees to embrace the knowledge philosophy and its underlying values so that it becomes the core behaviour. Because these are predominantly soft skills, intangible, it takes a longer time to develop and difficult to measure, organisation should integrate these into HRM practices. However, providing adequate training is costly and considered as a huge investment by the organisations (Chong, 2005; Rabiah et al., 2007). To remain competitive, organisations and their members are required to learn consistently (Palan, 2005; Senge, 1990; Whee, Ngah, & Seng, 2012) thus a continuous learning process in the organisation is necessary (Chiangmai, 2005; Rabiah et al., 2007; Scruggs, 2005; Umar, 2005; Whee et al., 2012). The concept of CPD, which focusses and calls upon organisation to encourage, support, and provide favourable environment for employees to engage in continuous lifelong learning (Adanu, 2007; Faizah & Hazadiah, 2006; Hazadiah & Jamiah, 2006; Jamiah, 2006; Jones & Fear, 1994; Noon, 1994; Putri, 2005; Tan, 2005) was introduced to develop and to ensure the up-to-date KSA among organisational professional as to avoid 'professional obsolete syndrome' among employees (Latham & Wexley, 2001; López-Cabrales et al., 2011; Tan, 2005; Umar, 2005). This syndrome occurs due to many reasons such as technological changes, changes in nature of work, and rapidity of new knowledge discoveries over the years (Eddy, Tannenbaum, Lorenzet, & Smith-Jentsch, 2005; Latham & Wexley, 2001; Snell & Bohlander, 2013; Umar, 2005). As a result, the KSA (regardless of either explicit or tacit) belongs to professionals and would be obsolete within five years (Latham & Wexley, 2001); or within two years for an engineer (Umar, 2005) if there is no action taken to enhance or to retain this KSA or competencies. As such it is important for the employees to remain relevant and current as well as for organisations to remain competitive.

For professional, lifelong learning is crucial to remain relevant and to ensure employees KSA are up-to-date.

More and more organisations realised the importance of human resource in creating wealth. To get better people, organisations are prepared to recruit new staff with competent knowledge and adequate skill or through developing the knowledge of existing manpower (Thurairajah & Lees, 2010). This is the challenge that HRD must take up by strengthening CPD efforts via continuous learning among employees (Adanu, 2007; Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Garrick, 1998; Guskey, 2000; Hearle, Morris, & Lawson, 2012; Jones & Fear, 1994; Maimunah, 2011; Noon, 1994; Putri, 2005). Professionals or employees in general should acknowledge the importance of CPD, and should no longer be viewed as something “I’ll do if I have the time”. This is because CPD foster a culture of on-going learning and commitment to personal and professional growth (Adanu, 2007; Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Jones & Fear, 1994; Noon, 1994). An organisation that promotes life-long learning eventually becomes a learning organisation (Adanu, 2007; Palan, 2005; Scruggs, 2005) thus it will create ‘community of practice’ among organisational members (Hamidi, Aziz, Sin, & Woods, 2012; Smith, 2005) to continually embark on knowledge discovery. Literatures on CPD suggested that learning can take place in three dimensions namely formal, non-formal and informal learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Conlon, 2004; Garrick, 1998; Smith, 2011; Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Wai, Hong, Din, & Bakar, 2012). Heretofore, not much research in Malaysia has been conducted on CPD especially its practices. Hence, this study intended to investigate the current practices of CPD towards competency development of employees in the service-based industry in Malaysia.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CPD is a lifelong learning process in which the learning is a purposeful activity whether formal, non-formal or informal, has no age limit and is based on access to knowledge and learning. It also covers encompasses the whole range of different contexts such as formal learning at school

and at the university, non-formal learning at the workplace and informal learning through literature and life experience (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002, p.10). CPD consists of reflective activities designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills. It supports individual needs and improves professional practices. Because effectiveness as a professional is based on applying a body of knowledge, it is critical that professionals keep current with the latest ideas and techniques in their field (The Chartered Institute of Professional Development, 2014). CPD can also be defined as the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. It is a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and continuously seeking to improve (Jones & Fear, 1994; Maimunah, 2011; Noon, 1994). Encouraging CPD is the key to optimizing a person's career opportunities, both for today and for the future (Young, 2005); lead to a better workforce development (Adanu, 2007; Putri, 2005; Young, 2005); produces competent, talented and skilled workforce (Jones & Fear, 1994) and a boost to the professionalism of the professions (Noon, 1994; Young, 2005). Organisations should encourage continuous learning among employees and improve its capabilities by leveraging the KSA of each employees through formal learning such as study sponsorship or scholarship (Adanu, 2007; Young, 2005); or non-formal structured training (Noon, 1994; Putri, 2005) or through informal learning (Garrick, 1998; Leader, 2003; Putri, 2005).

The concept of CPD has evolved to provide a mechanism that allows the practicing professionals to have access to resources that will enable updating of knowledge and skills. CPD is vital in a learning organisation context as it serves as a means to combat lack of up-to-date knowledge and skills about new techniques (Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Leader, 2003; Noon, 1994) as well as the basis for maintaining professional competencies (Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Jones & Fear, 1994; Noon, 1994). To improve on old skills and gain new ones to improve work performance is one of the major reasons why professionals embark on CPD activities (Adanu, 2007, p.302) thus CPD activities to be carried out must be consistent and relevant with strategic and operational business plans of a particular organization (Jones & Fear, 1994). Typically, CPD is provided through a number of different paths and they may take in the form of courses,

attendance or presentation of papers at conferences, attending seminars and technical meetings organized by professional institutions, educational establishments, employers and other approved providers. There are quite a number of professions that provide CPD to their members and non-members such as The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; The Chartered Institute of Building; The Chartered Institute of Marketing; The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals and The Chartered Institute for IT. In the Malaysian context, professional bodies that provide CPD for their members and non-members include Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management (MIHRM), Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM); and The Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM). These professional bodies offer CPD programmes ranging from certificates, diploma, and professional courses (Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management, 2013; Malaysian Institute of Management, 2013). For instance, to maintain professional competence employees are suggested to take a minimum of 20 hours of formal CPD per year (The Institution of Engineering and Technology, 2013), or 50 hours per year (Board of Engineers Malaysia BEM, 2013) or professional development may take the form of gaining new qualifications to follow a different career direction (Board of Engineers Malaysia, 2013; Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management, 2013; Malaysian Institute of Management, 2013; The Institution of Engineering and Technology, 2013).

CPD plays an important role in developing employee competencies, however there are several issues or challenges to CPD in terms of practices and effectiveness. These issues or challenges seem to limit the overall effectiveness of CPD. Firstly, in view of the literature with regards to CPD, much attention is focussed on formal and non-formal learning as a mean to improve employee competencies (Chuang, Jackson, & Jiang, 2013; Conlon, 2004; Cunningham & Hillier, 2013; Garrick, 1998; Jones & Fear, 1994) and these are mainly referred to as traditional CPD activities (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). It is common practice for organisations to allocate huge funds for employee development through formal education and training and development (Fuller et al. 2003; Kie, 2010; López-Cabrales et al., 2011; Putri, 2005; Young, 2005). Burns & Chisholm (2003); Chuang et al. (2013); Conlon (2004); Fuller et al. (2003); Nägele & Hasler (2010); and Umar (2005) stated that formal education or non-formal learning (traditional training and development program) clearly can never be enough to meet the growing

demand for skills required at work. For instance, Fuller et al. (2003) argued that relying on education and training to determine performance are inadequate to capture the whole spectrum of performance and unlikely to capture the relationship between learning and performance too. This is supported by a study conducted by Heijden et al. (2009) on employee employability that shows informal learning fills in the gaps that are left out by formal learning. Newton (2010) too agreed that traditional boundaries between school, higher education and workplace training are being blurred, with universities being positioned as a servicing industry through the development of transferable and life-long learning skills. Furthermore, as deliberated by Burns & Chisholm (2003, p.180), “traditional models of on-campus CPD are no longer relevant and much of the learning required is within the implicit environment of the organisation especially in relation to the tacit knowledge and advance knowledge skills development.

The acquisition of essential new competencies is functionally dependent on developing relevant knowledge within the workplace environment”. In the same wave of thought, quoting Zeszotarski (2001) and Meeriam & Caffarella (1991) views on this, Conlon (2004) agreed that formal learning institutions need to reflect current needs that drive workplace competence and not confounding with highly structured and institutionalized learning per se. Apart from that, non-formal learning which is mainly characterized by learning interventions, identifying training needs and “sending” people on courses (Sambrook, 2004, p.616) also created a serious gap between knowing and actually doing it (Ong, 2005) and not learner driven (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002). In addition to it, quoting studies done by Ponzurick, France and Logar (2000) and Wang & Newlin (2000); Kie (2010) demonstrate that the effectiveness of non-formal learning particularly has proven less significant towards competencies. For example, studies by Conlon (2004) and Heijden et al., (2009) have confirmed that most learning does not occur in formal situations, yet mainly contributed through informal way, both in and outside the workplace. The results of those studies indirectly proved that non-formal learning may not be the best CPD activity towards development of professional competencies.

Secondly, excessive discussion on formal education and training and development resulted in the ignorance of informal learning which also formed an important component of workplace learning (Garrick, 1998; Jones & Fear, 1994). Few scholars debate that relying on formal education and training are not sufficient to improve work performance as rapid changes taking place in almost all professions, organization and industry (Adanu, 2007; Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Fuller et al., 2003; Heijden et al., 2009; Jones & Fear, 1994; Nägele & Hasler, 2010; Newton, 2010; Ong, 2005; Umar, 2005). For instance, quoting Illeris (2003); Adanu (2007) agrees that developing employee competencies should not be restricted in acquiring education or knowledge in the traditional way, but organizations also need to integrate learning and competency development closely and directly to the working place where change constantly occurs. A study on CPD by Jones & Fear (1994) also indicated that many of their respondents prefer to take advantage of professional job-related opportunities (79%) and informal learning, self-directed development (68%) as their professional development methods followed by structured formal training not leading to qualifications (non-formal learning – 54%); then structured formal training leading to qualifications (formal education – 49%). In addition to it, discussion on the third learning component which is informal learning is still vague; forgotten and under-researched (Garrick, 1998; Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Studies show that informal learning fills in the knowledge and skills gap that are not covered by formal and non-formal learning (Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Garrick, 1998; Heijden, Boon, Klink, & Meijs, 2009; Smith, 2011). Quoting Hager (2004) study, Adanu (2007, p.295) agrees that informal workplace learning is at its best and is accurately described as a form of lifelong learning. Few other scholars (Adanu, 2007; Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Fuller et al., 2003; Heijden et al., 2009; Kie, 2010; Nägele & Hasler, 2010; Ong, 2005; Smith, 2011; Umar, 2005; Wijetunge, 2012) thus, urged more organizations to integrate informal learning in employee development as it also contributes significantly towards betterment of work performance and employee competency.

Thirdly, literature that discusses extensively about the informal learning in the workplace are often neglected and appear vague (Conlon, 2004; Cunningham & Hillier, 2013; Thomas &

Anderson, 2006) and less focus is given to informal learning as a powerful way of learning for employees to increase their competencies (Conlon, 2004; Fuller et al., 2003; Garrick, 1998; Heijden et al., 2009). Informal learning is deemed to be influenced by people experience thus it shapes how they view the reality about their work and workplace practices (Garrick, 1998). It is important to note that lifelong learning or learning organisation does not necessarily take place in the formal context of education but it can also be integrated with the experience gained informally (Leader, 2003). In spite of the importance in the role of informal learning in the workplace, research on the effect of informal learning which is predominantly tacit in nature is relatively neglected due to the notion of measurement difficulty (Conlon, 2004; Garrick, 1998). Nonetheless, many organizations or even professional bodies do not consider informal self development activities or learning at work to be evidence of CPD and prefer to give more weight on formal courses and further suggested that informal learning shall be recognized and valued equally with other forms of learning (Jones & Fear, 1994, p. 51). Studies by Smith (2011) and Heijden et al. (2009) revealed that informal learning can occur and often recognized as a means of supporting formal education. Quoting Trinder et al. (2008) study, Smith (2011) too agreed that informal learning differ from formal learning and non-formal learning where the former is characterized by the learner's perspective and takes place covertly at anytime and is not restricted by structure and environment. Livingstone & Eichler (2005) in Heijden et al. (2009); Borghans et al. (2006); Burns & Chisholm (2003) have reported a unique contribution of informal learning to job relevant competencies thus proves the pivotal role of informal learning in CPD.

Even with those challenges or limitations as discussed above, CPD is paramount in developing employee competency in order for organizations to remain competitive. The concept of CPD or life-long learning among professional persuade the sensible practitioner to undergo continuing development thus, prove to the need for life-long learning as a basis for maintaining competencies (Noon, 1994, p.7). As CPD practices in the organization is constantly debated, this study is therefore conducted to gauge the current CPD practices in various sectors of service-based organization in Malaysia. The next section discuss the methodology used in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative approach in which semi structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with fifteen HR Directors and HR Managers from different organizations in four different sectors (namely MNCs, GLCs, SMEs, and MGAs) in the Malaysian service-based industry located in Klang Valley. This section presents the results of an analysis of CPD practices based on several interviews with the subject-matter-expert from various sectors in Malaysian service-based industry. Fifteen HR Directors and HR Managers are interviewed in order to gauge their perspectives on the current practices of CPD as it describes the actual scenario on how they see; interpret; regulate; implement; and enforce CPD for staffs' development. The data collected via interviews are transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The selection of the respondents is based on their expertise in the area being studied as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Interview Respondents / Informants' Profile

Respondent	Position	Type of Sector	Nature of Service Business	Location
R1	Associate Manager (Learning and Development)	MNC	Delivery of Goods and Documents	Selangor
R2	HR Manager	SME	Hotel and Hospitality	Selangor
R3	Principal Assistant Director	MGA	Advisory and Enforcement of Medical Policy	Putrajaya
R4	Deputy Director	MGA	Advisory and Enforcement of Agricultural Policy	Kuala Lumpur
R5	Assistant General Manager (Career Development, Specialist and Talent Management)	GLC	Telecommunication	Kuala Lumpur
R6	Head (Learning and Human Capital Development)	GLC	Banking	Selangor
R7	HR Manager	GLC	Utilities	Selangor
R8	Head (Corporate and Business Resourcing)	MNC	Banking	Kuala Lumpur

R9	Group General Manager Human Resources	GLC	Hospitality	Selangor
R10	Industrial Relations Manager	MNC	Consumer Products	Selangor
R11	HR Manager	MNC	Asset Consultancy	Kuala Lumpur
R12	Senior Director (Talent Management)	MNC	Financial Services	Kuala Lumpur
R13	Director / Partner	SME	Consultancy	Selangor
R14	Assistant Vice President (Learning and Development)	MNC	Financial Services	Kuala Lumpur
R15	Director / Partner	SME	Consultancy	Selangor

These respondents represent various sectors namely MNC (6 respondents: R1, R8, R10, R11, R12, R14); GLC (4 respondents: R5, R6, R7, R9); SME (3 respondents: R2, R13, R15) and MGA (2 respondents: R3, R4). An in-depth face-to-face interview was conducted as a research approach for this study because this method allows the researcher to develop an extensive analysis by providing rich detailed information and provide new and fresh sight. Based on the feedback obtained from the interviews, the following section discusses the important findings using thematic analysis about .the current CPD practices in Malaysian service-based organization.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study obtained from several interviews with subject-matter-expert in this area. The interviews feedback are analyzed based on several themes that have been identified in the literature reviews. Each respondent was asked about current CPD practices in their respective organization. Their responses were analyzed and tabled for easy understanding as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of Interviews on Current CPD Practices

Respondents	Current CPD Practices in the Organization		
	Formal Learning (Formal Education)	Non-formal Learning (Training and Development)	Informal Learning (Active participation; daily interaction; sharing of cumulated knowledge, skills and experience)
R1	✓	✓	✓
R2	X	✓	✓
R3	✓	✓	✓
R4	✓	✓	✓
R5	X	✓	✓
R6	X	✓	✓
R7	✓	✓	✓
R8	✓	✓	✓
R9	✓	✓	✓
R10	X	✓	X
R11	✓	✓	✓
R12	✓	✓	✓
R13	X	✓	✓
R14	✓	✓	✓
R15	X	✓	✓
Total	9/15	15/15	14/15
%	60%	100%	93%

Table 2 above indicates that many organizations in the service-based industry acknowledge the importance of CPD through formal, non-formal and informal learning in developing employee competency. All 15 respondents (R1-R15) agree that non-formal learning through

training and development is paramount CPD activity in competency development of their employees. The majority of organization stated that they have a clear policy which involves 20% of staff development implemented through proper and structured training and development programs. However, many of the informants (R2, R9, R10, R11, R12 and R14; 40% or 6/15) agreed that relying on training alone for employee development is not sufficient enough. For instance, R10 pointed that for staff members who have been doing the work for about 20 years, softskills training appears more suitable rather than technical. R10 claimed that:

“The only kind of training (for this people) is to open their mind to think about relationship and sharing, but not so dogmatic mind. Work wise they know. Functional they are well versed with it. You don’t have to ask them, they will tell you. No mistakes on that kind of thing. It became repetitive year after year. I mean day in day out they have been doing the same thing. The ground is already grid and rich” [R10].

Furthermore, according to R12:

“Classroom training is only meant for 10% because we strongly believe that a person can learn on-the-job more than actually sitting in the class. Of course classroom training is important, it is critical especially in terms of learning new concepts, new practices or new tools to develop our competencies. But actual learning happens when we apply those concepts and tools at work and that means most of their time; they are actually working, isn’t it? So that’s why we say that 70% is on the job learning where I attend the classroom training and whatever I learnt in that classroom, I apply and I learn more and learn better. As you know, what I hear I remember, what I do I actually understand” [R12].

These findings are consistent with previous researches that training and development is the most common method conducted in the organization for employee development (Fuller et al. 2003; Kie, 2010; López-Cabrales et al., 2011; Putri, 2005; Young, 2005) but still it is not enough

and not the best remedy for employee development (Burns & Chisholm, 2003; Chuang et al., 2013; Conlon, 2004; Fuller et al., 2003; Nägele & Hasler, 2010; Umar, 2005).

With regards to formal education as part of CPD initiatives, however, only 9 out of 15 respondents (R1, R3, R4, R7, R8, R9, R11, R12 and R14) or 60% indicate that formal education is important in developing employee competency. For example R1 & R8 stated that their organizations are fully supportive and encourage staff to further their studies:

“Yes, to support that we also have education assistance programs. EAP we call that. That means we allow our employees to go and do their study, say for example if you don’t have a diploma, you want to continue your diploma; so we will encourage you to go and take up a relevant course. But of course, it must be relevant to the business needs. Yes, we pay RM15000. So, let say, if your fee is RM15000, it is fully paid. If you take up a masters and maybe the fee is RM25000 then we will fully pay RM15000. Yes, than after paying this, we bond them for 1 year. They only have 1 year bond upon completion” [R1].

“Yes. In fact we have SEAS (Staff education assistance scheme) to support and encourage our staff to improve their qualification and SAA (staff academic award) as a reward for staff who further and achieve higher level of education on their own initiatives” [R8]

About 40% or 6 respondents admit that having formal education program as part of CPD initiatives is not a practice or not a policy in their respective organization. Even though the organization is encouraging and supporting their staff to further their studies, however this is not the case for their organization due to (1) high cost issues (R2, R13 and R15) and (2) is not an organization policy (R5, R6 and R10). As commented by R2, R13 and R15 organization cannot afford to sponsor their staff who wish to further their tertiary education due to cost reason. For instance, R15 and R13 said that:

“No, we don’t sponsor staff. All our staffs are degree holders. If they do masters then it is on their own. But one of the categories that we can get CPD is by doing Masters” [R13].

“Unfortunately we don’t have that. I think we can’t afford it but we always tell them if you want to do that you can ask a loan from RISM (Royal Institution of Surveyor Malaysia). RISM, they have study loans. You have to apply” [R15].

These findings are consistent with several studies that indicate some organizations’ views that sending employees for training continuously is costly; involve huge investment and the result is intangible in nature (Chong, 2005; Rabiah et al., 2007) plus it relies on self-motivation and personal interest of individuals to improve themselves (Jones & Fear, 1994). And some might see this as being ignorant on the importance of being competent among their employees. Apart from the cost, formal education is also not part of an organization policy for staff development. For instance R5 and R6 commented that:

“But as a policy at the group level, there is no scheme like that. We don’t have that clause. To say that those people who want to further studies, at Y we don’t have that” [R5].

“They have to do it on their own. Actually quite a few of them who did that, usually use their own money. But I think many years ago when they were still known as X, they do. But when we were corporatized, we don’t have it any more” [R6].

On the other hand, about 93% or 14 respondents from a total of 15 agree that informal learning is a crucial part of CPD thus play a pivotal role in employee competency development. Some of the informants stated that their organizations have 70:20:10 policy (R1, R5, R6, R7, R8 and R12) for the staff development with mostly 70% of staff development done through on-the-job learning of which the staff need to teach and help each other while working and utilizing experience and knowledge of each other. For instance, R5 said that:

“Yes, they will learn from their experience..... All those things are on the job. When they do not know, they need to refer to their superior or they must call somebody to check whether what he did was correct. So, we always go in a team. So, on the ground, they will arrange, if one team is expert, they will bring somebody that not-so expert, so that it become like buddy (system). So that’s on the job training. This person will learn from the most senior. So that’s how one of the most effective ways we teach people about skills” [R5].

In addition to it, having recognized the importance of informal learning, R14, R12 and R10 commented that:

“We also realize that staffs learn most in the informal setting. Therefore we have created as many programs as possible to engage them such as family day, CSR, sport activities, event management in the organization just to name a few. We also reward them accordingly to their roles in informal learning activities This is to provide an opportunity for the staff to develop themselves and to build rapport among staff that only can be achieved beyond formal workplace. The organization will encourage them to build their own committee to organize certain projects which consisted of employees from cross border among various departments and no hierarchy was established. This is to let the ideas flow freely among them. This is in fact a great opportunity for them to learn from each other and use all skills that they have to make the events successful. We also believe that LLL through informal learning is able to develop relationship skills and it provides a good platform or opportunity for staff development in terms of their attitudes and skills” [R14].

“But if it (learning) is more informal then they have the flexibility to learn, when they want to, how they want to, in whatever shape and form, they are much more appreciative of that. They have the flexibility to do their job and at the same time learn” It is I think one of the biggest sources of knowledge. That’s why we encourage a lot on on-the-job learning and get people together to discuss, you know the lunch and learn we spoke about. It’s

absolutely that, where they interact with each other, learning from each other, sharing their knowledge, sharing their experience. So we provide those opportunities or medium to actually do that” [R12].

“Yes, I learnt from others and my own initiatives and then they are willing to teach me and found out myself. It’s a two way communication” [R10].

Many organizations consider informal learning as a powerful learning tool, however only one respondent (R10) indicated that informal learning is not in practice as there is no platform provided to allow them to learn from each other informally. Asking about employee learning from each other, R10 commented that:

“The excuse that I get, they said that not that they are not interested, but once they do it, it ended being part of their jobs. You know, I heard this a million times. People want to learn but at the same time they don’t want to be burden with extra work just because they have learnt and know how to do it. I blamed this to the former manager who did not encourage staff to learn and pick up new knowledge. It is very difficult to change this and it has become very rigid” [R10].

This scenario as mentioned by R10 has made informal learning to be less effective in R10’s organization because it has become rigid in the organization and employees only know their work duties and appear uninterested to learn about what the rest of their colleagues are doing. However, majority of the respondents agreed that informal learning plays an important role, thus it cannot be ignored in employee development. This finding is consistent with previous researches that highlighted the unique contribution of informal learning (Conlon, 2004; Fuller et al., 2003; Garrick, 1998; Heijden et al., 2009; Borghans et al., 2006; Burns & Chisholm, 2003).

With respect to CPD context, there are several studies using quantitative approach that try to acknowledge the importance of informal

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

It is recommended that organization should take into account informal learning as an important learning activity that contributes towards developing employee competencies continuously and integrate it structurally with the other two traditional learning activities. A standard evaluation need to be developed in order to gauge its effectiveness in contributing towards employee development. Formal education also must be given attention as this is the platform that provide employee with the latest knowledge and techniques in employee's related field or background of their work. Therefore, these studies imply the need for formal, non-formal and informal learning to be integrated as CPD activities, since all these three contribute significantly towards betterment of work performance. Besides that, organization must be very clear about responsibility for CPD at workplace. CPD activities should be mutual and a shared responsibility between organization and the individual employees. Both parties should be involved in planning, identifying and implementing proper CPD activities. As a suggestion for future research, informal learning should be integrated with the other CPD activities which particularly focusing on implementation issues and measuring its effectiveness.

In conclusion, the service-based industry in Malaysia especially in MNC, GLC, SME and MGA sectors, training and development or non-formal learning is the most common method applied in developing employee competencies continuously. However, informal learning also was highlighted as second most learning method in service-based organization in Malaysia. Nonetheless, to measure its effectiveness, many respondents agreed that there is no standard way to measure this as it is quite difficult to measure.

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