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HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYEES' CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Kardina Kamaruddin , Siti Hajar Mohd Hussain, Mazirah Binti Mohd Nizam[1]

[1]*Universiti Teknologi Mara, Cawangan Kedah*

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ABSTRACT

This study examined HRD approaches and its affects on employee character development. The study also investigated the components of HRD approaches (learning orientations of reinforcement, social learning, goal setting, needs, expectancy, andragogy, and information processing approach) that contribute to employee character development at workplace. A sample of 473 teachers in Malaysia responded to a questionnaire survey. Correlation and regression analyses were used in the data examination. Results showed that HRD approaches are likely to enhance employee character development. Furthermore, the data confirmed that HRD approaches (goal setting, andragogy, expectancy, and reinforcement approach) do contribute to employee character development in organizations. One implication for researchers is that a framework of HRD approaches measures, with demonstrably high reliability and validity, and known components has been developed. This study could be replicated in a bigger sample size with different occupational contexts, the HRD measures reconfirmed and expanded, follower characteristics included as moderating variables, and links to organizational performance should be explored

1.0 Introduction

Many studies on character development and its relationships to organizations are focused on leadership (*Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Fairholm, 1991, 1998; Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; May, Chan, Hodges, and Avolio, 2003; Price, 2002*). However, employees' characters are something we often take for granted. Employees' characters have been associated with their personal needs towards the organizations (*Yang, 2011; Milman and Dickson, 2014*) rather than the values that are related to their characters. Authors such as Rousseau (1990), Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer, (1998), and Schein (1985) emphasize that personal values lie at the core of characters.

Moreover, it is generally agreed that employees' characters are varied because of the diverse compositions of members in the organizations. Demonstrably, employees are different in demographic characteristics, for example, gender, age, educational level, working experience and cultural background which leads to differences in employees' characters. Chong, Smith, Sirkula, and Anderson (2011) observe that employees' characteristics are unique when compared to work-

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ers with different geographical locations, experiences, and cultures. Thus, based on this assumption, managers face challenges to gauge and develop diverse employees' character. Managers of organizations always try to find ways to stimulate their employees' towards authentic characters that encompass the consistency between their characters, values and attitudes. In addition, this also could enhance their ethical reasoning and actions.

Consequently, it is imperative that organizations are able to nurture the character of their employees to ensure their human resources are aligned to the organizational objectives. Human resource development (HRD) is one of the functions of human resource management (HRM) that assists organization in developing their human capitals. Nadler (1970) states that HRD is the sequenced of activities coordinated in a stated time and planned to issue behavioral change. HRD is not only aim to train for working expertise but also including behavioral expertise as eventually target to generate the better humanities which their abilities are "acquired, sharpened and used" (*Kumar, 2005*). Thus, HRD can be utilized to help management to develop employees' characters that can contribute to organization performance.

The present research concentrated on studying HRD approaches that can influence character development among employees in Malaysia - where to our knowledge no studies of employees' character building have been conducted.

This research aims to give answers to the two questions:

RQ1. What are the relationships between HRD approaches to employees' character development in Malaysia?

RQ2. What is the influence of HRD approaches on character development among employees in Malaysia?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Character development

The studies on character development can be divided into two perspectives. The first perspective is to find the definitions of the concept. There are various definitions of character development. Firstly, many studies defined character development through its attributes. Lickona (1991) defines character development as tri-phasic. The first phase is moral knowing or "know the good", which includes moral awareness and moral reasoning, and deciding the right course of action. The second phase is moral feeling or "love the good", which is a concern about doing the right thing. Moral feeling consists of conscience, self-esteem, empathy, and humility. The third phase is moral action or "do the good", which means acting with competence and will. Kamaruddin (2012) addresses character as a series of components such as comprehension (cognitive), perspectives (attitudes), and inspiration (motivations), and actions (behaviours) and expertise (skills). Duna and Nik Ahmad (2012) give emphasize that character is the internal states, traits, qualities or abilities that individuals' possess which lead them to perform the behaviour without thought and deliberation and have developed into a habit. In sum, these definitions present individual moral imperatives.The second perspective is the applications of character development. Many studies apply the concept of character development in leaders, and education. Calabrese and Roberts (2002) emphasize that leaders with virtuous character provide benefit to their schools and communities.

In other circumstances, it was understood that leaders with character flaws could create harm for themselves as well as their community. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) showed that character as a leadership trait consists of six elements: drive, desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. Similarly, Gergen (2001) suggested that character, vision, and political capacity are three essential traits of anyone aspiring to a leadership position. Tait's (1996) found those leaders' characters consisted of honesty, fairness, compassion, humility, and being one's own person. Barker and Coy (2003) presented the seven virtues of a leader which are humility, courage, integrity, compassion, humour, passion, and wisdom. Another aspect of character development is in education. Character education relates curriculum evolved to educate around important characteristics required to form better character (*Almerico, 2014*). The study involved defining the attributes of successful character evolution plans for categories K-6 form about children's written works. The debates concentrate on how literature can be conduct into the curriculum in assisting to build characteristics in a significant, considerable way.

The study suggested the subsequent character attributes necessary to incorporate in a literacy form of character evolution curriculum which are attentive, empathy, caring, warm-heartedly, and compassion, nationality, bravery, truthful, honesty, persistence in emerging and achieving goals, respect, commitment, and collaboration and group work. Mann (2006) explores the foundation for the development of professional character that integrates moral conduct into professional practice. The study emphasized that character education should be acknowledged as a moral endeavour and values-based practice. In sum, character development can be applied either implicitly or explicitly through education.

Although, literature has identified the definitions and applications of character development, it has not identified the antecedents of the concept. Taking into consideration companies' objectives which are related to achieving high individual and organizational performance, it is recommended to adopt HRD in respective of employees' character development that focus on learning and education through training strategies. From the perspective of HRD, it is justified to approach the problem of understanding and supporting employee's character development by way of analysing their learning physiognomies. In addition, although numerous studies pointing contributions of HRD and performance, there is lack of study that identify the relationships between training strategies and character development in employees. This gap, addressed in this paper, is expressed in Proposition 1:

P1. There is a relationship between HRD approaches and employee character development.

2.2 The role of HRD approaches in stimulation of employee character development

HRD can be defined as individual or group learning (*Hamlin and Stewart, 2010*). Werner and DeSimone (2006) state that HRD as a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organisation to provide its members with the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet current and future job demands. Harrison and Kessels (2004) explain HRD as an organisational process comprises the skilful planning and facilitation of a variety of formal and informal learning and knowledge processes and experiences, primarily but not exclusively in the workplace, in order that organisational progress and individual potential can be enhanced through the competence, adaptability, collaboration and knowledge-creating activity of all who work for the organisation. Another definition that focuses on employee learning is by Ruona and Lynham (1999) that reiterate the purpose of HRD is to enhance learning, human potential and

high performance in work related systems.   Therefore, comprehension learning approaches is important since it give impact to the employees' character building. This is presented in Proposition 2:

P2: There is significant influence among HRD approaches on employee character building.

Employees' learning can be influenced by the environment. This study has identified 7 approaches that contribute to employees learning and adaptation of their surrounding:

2.1.1 Reinforcement approach

Skinner (1953) work is built on the assumption that behaviour is influenced by its consequences. Reinforcement learning is the process of shaping behaviour by controlling consequences of the behaviour through positive and negative reinforcement. Noe (2013) stresses that people are influenced to execute or avoid a few actions because of the past consequence that have arisen from that behaviours and it can be in positive, negative, extinction and punishment . Employee character development at work can be positively enhanced if the actors are adequately motivated through rewards. This can be catalysed through a consistent process of reinforcement. Omomia and Omomia (2014) argued that reinforcement is a central concept in human acquisition of skills and performance competence. By extension, it could be argued that reinforcement is any factor which when made to follow a response immediately will increase the probability of the occurrence of the response to a conditioned stimulus or stimulus event (*Oladele, 2004; Adenigbade, 1997; Akinboye, 1992; Chauhan, 1992*). The direct implication is that any consequence that follows behaviour must be conditional upon the behaviour (*Elliott, Kratochwill, Littlefield-Cook and Travers, 2000*).

2.1.2 Social learning approach

Learning can be done informally through the influence of society. Bandura (1986) proposes that social learning happens through observation, imitation, and modelling. He further suggests that all behaviours are learned through conditioning, and cognitive understanding, which take into account psychological influences such as attention and memory. Social learning explains employee character development in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences.

2.1.3 Goal setting approach

Goal setting approach (*Locke & Latham, 1990*) is based on the conception that human behave with a purpose. The behaviour is regulated by the individual's goals. The domain of goal setting approach lies within the domain of purposefully directed action. The approach focuses on the question of why some people perform better on work tasks than others. Or why people behave differently at workplace. If they are equal in ability and knowledge, then the cause must be motivational. Goal setting theory approaches the issue of motivation from a first-level perspective; its emphasis is on an immediate level of explanation of individual differences in task performance (R*yan, 1970*). The theory states that the simplest and most direct motivational explanation of why some people perform better than others is because they have different performance goals. Thus, employee character development can be cultivated by utilizing goal setting approach.

2.1.4 Needs approach

A need is an internal state that makes certain outcomes appears attractive (*Kaita and David, 2015*). However, Noe (2013) present needs as an insufficiency of an individual. This will create tension and stimulate drives within an individual to find particular goals to reduce the tension (*Ball, 2013*). Ward et al (2009) state that the psychological definition of a need is that it is a trait that impels an individual to pursue a goal through an action that also gives purpose, meaning and direction for the behaviour of the individual. Individual needs serve as motivation to achieve goals. The question of what motivates or affects the behaviour of employee has long being asked and researched on. Many theories evolved on factors that influence employee performance. However, no studies have looked in the perspectives of how needs can developed employees' characters. Psychologists have studied that needs and wants influence human behaviour. Thus, needs approach can be seen as a way to enhance employee's character development.

2.1.5 Expectancy approach

Lunenberg (2011) expresses that expectancy approach as a cognitive process of motivation that is based on the idea that people believe there are relationships between the effort they put forth at work, the performance they achieve from that effort, and the rewards they receive from their effort and performance. In other words, people will be motivated if they believe that strong effort will lead to good performance and good performance will lead to desired rewards. Vroom (1964) argues that person is motivated to the degree that he or she believes that (a) effort will lead to acceptable performance (expectancy), (b) performance will be rewarded (instrumentality), and (c) the value of the rewards is highly positive (valence). He further exerts that expectancy is a person's estimate of the probability that job-related effort will result in a given level of performance. Thus, expectancy approach identifies that job behaviour is a joint function of ability, role perceptions and motivation (*Lawler and Suttle, 1973*). Consequently, expectancy approach can be attributed as a source for employee character development

2.1.6 Andragogy approach

Andragogy approach focuses on the concept of self-directed learning whereby the learner is a collaborator in the learning process, making trainers and learners partners in the educational process (*Knowles, 1975*). This approach enables individual to control their learning and adopts what is relevant based on their unique experiences. This approach is relevant at workplace as there are diverse in age and work, leadership, and life experiences; hence, employees transitioning at different stages of their career may understand and relate core character development to their own experiences differently from other personnel. As such, we call upon andragogy as a method to employee character development.

2.1.7 Information processing approach

The basic idea of information processing approach is that the human mind is like a computer or information processor rather than behaviourist notions that people merely responding to stimuli (*Miller, 1956*). Information processing highlights thought mechanisms in that it receives input, processes, and delivers output. Information gathered from the senses (input), is stored and processed by the brain, and finally brings about a behavioural response (output). The implications of this approach are clear. If character development is to take place, new information must be transferred into

long-term memory. Therefore, repetition and maintenance rehearsal are not sufficient to produce a lasting effect. This has great relevance to instruction and teaching, for if the aim of training is learning, information must be presented in such a way that it can be incorporated into the memory structure (*Lutzz and Huizz, 2003*).

Overall, the importance of having employees with the right character is an essential source to socially responsible and ethically organization practice that cannot be undervalued. Since many researchers focuses on leaders' character development (*Calabrese and Roberts, 2002; Goffee and Jones, 1998*), there is seriously lack of study that show the significance of developing employee character. This is because employees with good character can contribute to strong organizational cultures that promote honest and best ethics to achieve work outcomes. In turn, would contribute to social as well as economic benefits. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the relationship between HRD approaches and employees character building in Malaysia public sector.

3. Estimation Method

The aim of the quantitative study is to examine the relationships between individual HRD approaches and employee character development. An attempt has also been made to demonstrate which HRD approaches accounting for character development are understood as behaviors and create re¬sults to the largest extent. The main hypothesis is con¬cerned with the existence of a statistically significant correlation between HRD approaches and employee character development among public school teachers. To verify this hypothesis, independent regression anal¬yses for individual approaches have been carried out. The objective of the qualitative study is the examination of HRD approaches in public sector organizations firms and capturing the nature of individual HRD approaches.

The research sample was composed of teachers from various schools in the Northern Malaysia. Five hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed randomly to the school teachers and of the 550 questionnaires distributed, 500 were returned and only 473 completed by the respondents (N=473).

For the purpose of measurement of HRD approaches, statements derived from tools used for conceptions of HRD approaches were adopted (Knowles, 1990; Smith, 1990; Vroom, 1964; Gilley and Egglund,1989; Chalofsky and Lincoln, 1983; Nadler and Wiggs, 1986; Bettman and Park, 1980; Ozcelik and Yildirim, 2005; Noe, 2013; McClelland, 1978; Kaelbling, Littman and Moore,1996; Woergoetter and Porr, 2008), which referred to operationalization of HRD approaches. Based on exploratory analysis of the factors, the fol¬lowing approaches were discerned: reinforcement, social observation, goal settings, needs, expectancy, andragogy, and lastly information processing approach. Diagnosis of character building is established on the basis of measurement of aggregated moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Their detailed characterization along with reliability param¬eters and analysis of the factors are based on the conception of previous author such as Lickona (1991).

4. Results and Discussion

In the first stage of analysis, pilot test were conducted to identify the reliability of the survey items (Table 1). The variables were deemed reliable as all variables scored more than 0.7 (Sekaran, 1995).

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Reinforcement Learning	0.898
Social Observation	0.778
Goal Setting	0.773
Needs	0.896
Expectancy	0.833
Adult Learning	0.927
Information Processing	0.785
Character building	0.810

The second stage of analysis, the values of the coefficients of correlation for individual variables were estimated (Table 2).

Table 2: Correlations

		HRD	CB
HRD	Pearson Correlation	1	.58
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	473	473
CD	Pearson Correlation	.585**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	473	473

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Juxtaposition of regression analysis results for individual predictors of character building

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	19.849	3.720		5.336	.000
	RLC	.253	.087	.136	2.892	.004
	SOC	-.018	.103	-.008	-.171	.864
	NEC	-.015	.100	-.008	-.152	.879
	ALC	.405	.108	.200	3.743	.000
	ELC	.258	.085	.143	3.045	.002
	IPC	.150	.088	.082	1.707	.089
	GSC	.532	.100	.251	5.308	.000

Note: RLC- Reinforcement Learning, SOC- Social Observation, NEC- Needs, ALC-Andragogy, ELC- Expectancy Learning, IPC - Information Processing, GSC- Goal Setting.

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As far as HRD and employee character development (Table 2) are con¬cerned, the results shows that there is a significant relationship between HRD and character building (r= 0.585, p=0.000). The size of effect between HRD and character building was found to be positive and largely correlated. The mutual correla¬tions between HRD approaches and character development, which were discovered in the study, served as basis for further exploratory analyses. To determine the type of influence between HRD approaches and indicate which of them account for employee character building to the largest extent; independent regression analyses were conducted (separately for each variable as factors in the same theoretical construct which are strongly statistically correlated with one another may not be examined with a single regression model) on a sample of employees under analysis, N=473. Juxtapo¬sition of the results of analysis is presented in Table 3.

Based on the regression analysis that has been car¬ried out, it may be stated that the approaches that ac¬count for employee character building – understood as ag¬gregated moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior – to the largest extent are goal setting (r= 0.251, p=0.000), andragogy (r=0.200, p=0.000), expectancy (r= 0.143, p=0.002), and reinforcement (r= 0.136, p=0.004) approach.

5. Conclusion

The study was concerned with empirical verification of the assumption that there is a relationship between HRD approaches and character building of employees. This study is based on the assumption that positive effects arising from the influences of HRD could affect employees' character development and in turn create a positive culture in the organization.

Statistical analyses allowed us to single out the practices/approaches that to the largest extent account for workers' character development. These are goal setting, andragogy, expectancy, and reinforcement approaches. It may thus be said that in the context of developing employee specific behavior which are acceptable in the organization, the practice related to creation of training environment that suit various behavioral task and enrichment, the requirement of intense goal-orientation, the emphasis on values and the necessity to make use of various corroboration strategies while simultaneously ensur¬ing the acceptance of employees diversity are treat¬ed individually contribute both to display of desired organizational behaviors as well as individual employees uniqueness. From HRD point of view, it is important to offer such a structure of training and learning which will encourage engagement and simultaneously create possibilities for effective culture. The content of training and development programs itself can offer motivation at work (*Hackman and Oldham, 1976*), which is can contribute to feeling of autonomy and satisfaction (C*outts and Grumman, 2012*).

Conclusions drawn from the study con¬ducted point to a strong position of HRD and a major role that it plays in building the competitive advantage of companies on the basis of work¬ers' behavior and attitude at work, which is the key resource.

There were some limitations to our study. First, given that the present study was based on a convenience sample and the impossibility of determining its representativeness apart from state of origin, we recommend a more rigorous examination of character development in employees is appropriate using a larger and more representative sample. Second, future research should also extend the present findings by examining the linkages among HRD approaches, and character building in different work contexts. Third, although the measures of character developed in this study had satis-

factory internal consistency, they require further psychometric evaluation. Finally, future research, using techniques such as confirmatory factor analysis, is required to evaluate the construct validity of the measures.

Despite these limitations, strength of this study is in its capacity to measure identifiable HRD attributes using a reliable and situation independent instrument. Although, our results cannot be compared by other authors since it is a novel study, it contributes to the understanding of learning nature in the organization. However, the extent to which employees are prepared to be honest in their responses is ambivalent, and for this reason we recommend more research using the measures of HRD approaches developed in this study.

Finally, we would suggest that the relationships between the constructs of HRD and character development are now in need of further research. Future studies may find that HRD approaches is as yet an important but untapped dimension of leader and employee effectiveness, job satisfaction, and employee engagement, to name but a few of the important associations in need of verification.

Our study has taken a small step in operationalizing HRD as a contributor to learning organizational cultures and outcomes, consistent with numerous conceptual manifestations (*Noe, 2013*).

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