THE EFFECT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON MOTIVATION TO TRANSFER: EVIDENCE FROM THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Motivation to transfer is a requirement for transfer of training to occur in an organization. Motivation to transfer is defined as the employees' desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. This paper argues that the motivation to transfer can be enhanced through human resource management (HRM) practices. In addition, this study proposes that motivation to learn mediates the relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer. The results of this study using a sample of 306 public sector employees in Malaysia provide support for the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, the results show that the motivation to learn partially mediates the effects of HRM practices on employee motivation to transfer. There are two important contributions of this study. First, this study provides empirical evidence about the role of human resource management (HRM) practices as a predictor to motivation to transfer in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia. Second, this study provides empirical evidence that motivation to learn mediates the relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia. Second, this study provides empirical evidence that motivation to learn mediates the relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer.

Keywords: Human resource management practices, motivation to transfer, public sector, Malaysia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation to transfer is defined as the employees' desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization (Holton, 2005; Gegenfurtner, 2020). Researchers (e.g., Gegenfurtner, 2020; Suleiman, Dassanayake, & Othman, 2018; Blume, Ford, Surface, & Olenick, 2019; Gegenfurtner, Festner, Gallenberger, Lehtinen, & Gruber, 2009a; Marler, Liang, & Duleborn, 2006) and practitioners (Hutchins & Burke, 2007) have argued that motivation to transfer is a requirement for transfer of training to occur in an organization. An employee who is motivated to transfer the training outcomes after training can succeed in

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transferring the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to their current task in organization (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner, & Gruber, 2009b). In contrast, employees with inadequate motivation to transfer are likely to face difficulty in transferring the training outcomes to their current task in organization (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010).

Understanding the factors that influence motivation to transfer was the main agenda of previous studies in this field. Researchers have identified a range of factors that have influence on motivation to transfer, including the support and feedback from peer and supervisor (Bhatti, Battour, Sundram, & Othman, 2013; Reinhold, Gegenfurtner, & Lewalter, 2018; Arefin & Islam, 2019), perceived organizational support (Chiaburu, Dam, & Hutchins, 2010), organizational learning culture (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; Islam, 2019), knowledge sharing (Rahimli, 2012), employee satisfaction (Peters, Barbier, Faulx, & Hansez, 2012), work commitment (Suleiman, Dassanayake, & Othman, 2018; Taylor, 2018) and self-efficacy (Ayres, 2005; Arefin & Islam, 2019). Although findings from previous studies have provided adequate understanding for organizations about the factors that can enhance motivation to transfer, there is still limited understanding about the role of human resource management (HRM) practices on motivation to transfer.

Recent researchers have suggested that studying the relationship between HRM practices and employee motivation is an important research direction (Knies, Boselie, Gould-Williams, & Vandenabeele, 2015). One reason for this is to provide empirical evidence to the notion, which has been hypothesized by previous studies, that organizational factors (in this study refers to HRM practices) to have a direct influence on employees' motivation, particularly on their motivation to transfer and motivation to learn (Ayres, 2005; Noe & Schmitt, 1986). The underlying assumption is that the HRM practices in organization can improve employee motivation to transfer and motivation to learn. These relationships have, however, yet to be empirically tested in the literature.

Motivation to learn is an important factor that influences the motivation to transfer. Motivation to learn can be described as a specific desire on the part of the employee to learn the content of the training program (Noe & Schmitt, 1986). The association between motivation to learn and motivation to transfer has been empirically supported by several studies (e.g., Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Al-Eisa, Furayyan, & Alhemoud, 2009). These studies found that employees who have a desire to learn the training content, will show desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. Another study, however, has found limited success in empirically demonstrating the relationship between motivation to learn and motivation to transfer (e.g., Seyler, Holton, Bates, Burnett, & Carvalho, 1998). The study reveals that even though employee shows desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training of the training program. These inconsistent findings require further examination in a different context to validate the relationship between motivation to learn and motivation to transfer.

Reviews of the literature show that recent studies have been interested in assessing the mediating role of motivation to learn. For example, Mohamad, Ismail, and Mohamad Nor (2020) found the management support in training programs was positively related to motivation to learn, which in turn improved motivation to perform. Similarly, Afsar and Umrani (2019) showed that transformational leadership has a positive impact on employees' innovative work behavior and motivation to learn mediated transformational leadership-innovative work behavior link.

Accordingly, this study expects that the human resource management practices will positively relate to motivation to learn, which in turn will enhance the motivation to transfer.

This study was conducted to address the gaps identified earlier by proposing a conceptual framework that includes those factors that affect motivation to transfer, known as HRM practices and motivation to learn. The conceptual framework has been examined in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia. The rationale for testing the proposed model in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia is based on the fact that previous studies on motivation to transfer have mostly been conducted in private sector organizations (Curado, Henriques, & Ribeiro, 2015; Grohmann, Beller, & Kauffeld, 2014). In previous studies, evidence has been presented showing that public and private sector organization (Buelens & Broeck, 2007). In addition, previous research on motivation to transfer has mostly been conducted in Western countries (Curado et al., 2015; Grohmann et al., 2014). Consequently, the main corpus of work on motivation to transfer has to date referred only to Western cultural contexts and therefore our understanding of this issue in other contexts, particularly Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, is still limited (Baharim, 2008; Arefin & Islam, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer

The recent researchers in the context of Malaysia have suggested to examine the effect of different HRM practices on employees in organization (Abdul Rahman, Ab Hamid, & Mustaffa, 2018). Lian (2017) suggested that greater attention should be given to specific HRM practices such as work life balance, career development, training and development. Another aspect of HRM practice that consistently include in HRM studies in Malaysia is renumeration (Hee & Jing, 2018; Taahir, Ng, Remie, & Mohd Remie, 2020). Therefore, the HRM practices in this study refer to activities in an organization such as remuneration, training and development, career development and work life balance (Presbitero, Roxas, & Chadee, 2016). It has been suggested that the HRM practices in an organization can influence employee work attitude and behavior (Peter & Eunice, 2014) and work performance (Fening & Amaria, 2011). In addition, researchers believe that organizational factors such as the HRM practices could lead to employee motivation to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b; Noe & Schmitt, 1986). The assumption is that when employees satisfy with the remuneration provided by an organization, received appropriate training, career development, and work life balance from the organization, they will demonstrate positive outcomes that will beneficial to their organization. The explanation is in line with social exchange theory, which posits that when employees perceive that their organization cares about their well-being (e.g., provide attractive remuneration package, organize training and development programs), they are more likely to feel obligated to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to their organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) such as motivation to transfer. Previous studies demonstrated that when employees have the desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization, they will success in applying it (Grohmann et al., 2014), which consequently enhance their performance (Zumrah, Boyle, & Fein, 2013). On the basis of the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: HRM practices will be positively related to motivation to transfer

2.2. The relationship between HRM practices and motivation to learn

Researchers such as Noe and Schmitt (1986) posit that work environment factor (i.e. HRM practices) might have a positive effect on employees' motivation to learn. The assumption has received support from other researcher who argue that employees' motivation to learn at a particular development program is influenced by organizational factors such as recognition, job security, and respect from peers (Ayres, 2005). A possible explanation of this effect is that an effective HRM practices can enhance employees' emotion, such as trusts to the organization (Vanhala & Ahteela, 2011) and turnover intention (Wheeler, Harris, & Harvey, 2010). According to previous studies, when employees show positive emotion in the workplace, they intend to demonstrate positive behavior that beneficial to the organization (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008) such as in this study motivation to learn (a specific desire on the part of the employee to learn the content of the training program). Based on the discussion, it is posited that if organizations implement effective HRM practices, employees are more likely to have a desire to learn the content of the training program. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: HRM practices will be positively related to motivation to learn

2.3. The relationship between motivation to learn and motivation to transfer

Researchers in the field of training have consistently suggested that motivation to learn might have a direct and positive effect on motivation to transfer (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b). The previous indications would suggest that if employees have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they are more likely to have a desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. This assumption has been supported by a number of empirical studies conducted in various organizations (e.g., Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Al-Eisa et al., 2009). One possible reason is due to employees with higher levels of motivation to learn may perform during training better than their less motivated counterparts (Al-Eisa et al., 2009). According to Liebermann and Hoffmann (2008), employees who perform during training (i.e. gaining new knowledge, skills and attitudes from the training), their intention to practice the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to their current task in organization should increase. On this basis, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Motivation to learn is positively related to motivation to transfer

2.4. Motivation to learn as a mediator between HRM practices and motivation to transfer

As previously mentioned, this study proposes that HRM practices is expected to have a positive relationship with motivation to learn. Motivation to learn is predicted to have a positive relationship with motivation to transfer. These perspectives are necessary and sufficient to establish the mediation effect (Kenny et al., 1998; Zumrah & Boyle, 2015). Accordingly, this study proposes that motivation to learn could mediate the HRM practices and motivation to transfer relationship. In other word, this study proposes HRM practices is expected to influence motivation to learn,

which in turn will encourage motivation to transfer. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 4: Motivation to learn is a mediator between the HRM practices and motivation to transfer

Based on the previous hypotheses, below is a research framework of this study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research Framework



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

Purposive sampling technique has been used to select the sample for this study. This technique was chosen since this study focuses on a specific target group (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010), which is the public sector employees who attended a 'Mind Transformation Program'. This is due, in part, to the fact that each training type has its own specific content and objectives, which may influence the application of knowledge and skills learned in training to the workplace (Laker & Powell, 2011). In addition, using the trainees of one specific type of training as the study sample has been applied by previous study in this field (e.g., Gegenfurtner, 2020).

The data were collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire has been distributed at two points of time. Time one at the beginning of the training that consist of questions related to HRM practices and motivation to learn. While time two at the end of the training, which consist of questions related to motivation to transfer. A total of 308 questionnaires was collected. However, only 306 questionnaires contained complete data. The other 2 questionnaires have been eliminated due to incomplete (few questions have not been answered by respondents).

Among the respondents, 63 percent (n = 193) were male and 37 percent (n = 113) were female. 76 percent (n = 231) are still single, while 24 percent (n = 75) of them have married. In term of age, the majority, 86 percent (n = 264) of them are between 20 – 30 years old, 12 percent (n = 36) are between 31 - 40 years old, and only 2 percent (n = 5) of them are between 41 - 50 years old.

3.2. Measures

This study used previously published measures. All measures were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

Human resource management (HRM) practices were measured using 13 items developed by Langford (2009). These 13 items related to remuneration (4 items), training and development (3 items), career development (3 items) and work life balance (3 items). An example of the items is 'I am satisfied with the income I receive' (remuneration), 'there is a commitment to ongoing training and development of staff' (training and development), 'I am given opportunities to develop skills needed for career progression' (career development), 'I can have a good balance between work and other activities' (work life balance). The measure was validated in a recent study by Presbitero et al. (2016). Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was 0.82.

Motivation to learn was measured using five items, while motivation to transfer was measured using four items. Both measures are developed by Baharim (2008). An example of the items is 'I knew that I would obtain something beneficial from this training' (motivation to learn), 'I will put into practice what I have learned from the training to the workplace' (motivation to transfer). The measure was validated in a study by Baharim (2008). Cronbach's alpha for these scales in this study was 0.94 for motivation to transfer, and 0.85 for motivation to learn.

4. ANALYSIS RESULTS

The data of this study have been analyzed through structural equation modeling technique, using AMOS software. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this study estimated a measurement model using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) prior to examining the structural model relationships.

The measurement model that included all items showed a good fit. For example, the value of chisquare (χ^2) / degrees of freedom (*df*) is 4.844. According to previous researchers (e.g., Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell 2007; Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009), the score of χ^2 /df between 2 and 5can justify the good fit of a particular model. The comparative fit index (CFI) also showed acceptable value, which is 0.915. In addition, the value of the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) achieves acceptable value (0.062), which is below 0.10. According to Hair et al. (2010) and Williams et al. (2009), SRMR value less than 0.10 is considered a good model.

Based on Table 1, the composite reliability and the Cronbach's alpha provide evidence of internal consistency. In addition, all indicators loaded strongly and significantly on their respective factors, and the standardized loadings ranged from 0.608 to 0.937. The result of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable has also exceeded 50 percent, indicating the convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, Table 2 shows that the square roots of AVE estimates are greater that the corresponding interconstruct correlations estimates, indicating discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010).

	HRM Practices	Motivation to Transfer	Motivation to Learn
Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.822	0.942	0.851
Composite Reliability	0.833	0.941	0.862
Average Variance Extracted	0.554	0.803	0.563
Item Abbreviation			
HRM1	0.725		
HRM2	0.795		
HRM3	0.808		
HRM4	0.608		
MTT1		0.856	
MTT2		0.937	
MTT3		0.914	
MTT4		0.862	
MTL1			0.703
MTL2			0.642
MTL3			0.741
MTL4			0.799
MTL5			0.828

Notes: N = 306; χ^2 = 300.319; df = 62; p < 0.000; χ^2/df = 4.844; CFI = 0.915; SRMR = 0.063. All are significant (p < 0.001)

Table 2: Means	s, Standard	l Deviation	and Correl	lation Matrix
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Variable	M	SD	HRM	MTT	MTL
HRM	4.123	0.502	0.738		
MTT	4.514	0.531	0.574**	0.893	
MTL	4.371	0.563	0.622**	0.706**	0.745

Notes: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; HRM = human resource management; MTT = motivation to transfer; MTL = motivation to learn. The square root of AVE value mark with bold. ** = p < 0.001.

After estimating the measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis, the second stage of analysis involved estimating the proposed relationships. As demonstrated in Table 3, all the fit indices suggest a reasonable fit between the model and the data. The results of the analyses are presented in Figure 2. The results indicate that human resource management (HRM) practices are positively related to motivation to learn (coefficient = +0.737, critical ratio = 9.005, p < 0.001) and motivation to transfer (coefficient = +0.174, critical ratio = 2.139, p < 0.05). In other words, the findings indicate that the implementation of HRM practices (e.g., remuneration, training and development, career development, work life balance) can facilitate the employee desire to learn the content of the training program, and to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization at the end of the training program. In addition, the analysis result also shows that motivation to learn is positively related to motivation to transfer (coefficient = +0.647, critical ratio = 7.597, p < 0.001). This result means employees who have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they will show desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. These results support hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 of the study. Based on the previous results, this study indicates that the effects of HRM practices on motivation to transfer are partially mediated by motivation to learn (Chand, 2010; Zumrah & Boyle, 2015), so hypothesis 4 is supported. A discussion of the findings is presented in the following section.

Fit Indices	Value
Chi-square χ^2 (<i>p</i> -value)	300.319 (<i>p</i> < 0.000)
Degree of freedom (<i>df</i>)	62
Normed Chi-square (χ^2/df)	4.844
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.915
Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	0.063





Notes: Figures are factor loadings followed by critical ratio value. The critical ratio value indicates the significant level of factor loading. The minimum critical ratio value of 1.960 is required for the factor loading to be significant (Byrne 2010). *** p < 0.001.

5. DISCUSSION

Although the literature review has shown various factors that influence employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer, there is still a lack of studies have analyzed the role of HRM practices on employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. Thus, this study is conducted addressed these gaps by examining the relationships between HRM practices, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia.

From an empirical analysis, HRM practices, which consist of remuneration, training and development, career development, and work life balance are positively related to employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. These results suggest that the existing HRM practices in public sector organization in Malaysia can facilitate the employee desire to learn the content of the training program, and also can encourage employee desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. These findings are important outcomes that has not been empirically determined previously in training literature. These findings help to clarify and support previous research indicating that the improvement in employee motivation in training can be achieved by implementing in the workplace an effective organizational practice (Ayres, 2005; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b; Noe & Schmitt, 1986). Specifically, this study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence that HRM practices in the public sector organizations in Malaysia have a positive impact on employee motivation to transfer the training outcomes to their current task in organization.

In addition, this study provides empirical evidence that links motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. In other word, this study has confirmed that when employees have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they will show desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization at the end of the training program. This

finding provides cross-validation of past empirical findings related to the positive effect of motivation to learn on motivation to transfer that previously related to organizations in Western (Kontoghiorghes, 2002) and Middle East (Al-Eisa et al., 2009) settings.

Moreover, this study has found that motivation to learn acts as a mediator in the relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer. In other word, the HRM practices in public sector organization in Malaysia can facilitate the employee desire to learn the content of the training program, which in turn encourage the employee desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization. The significant relationship between the factors (HRM practices – motivation to learn – motivation to transfer) is an important finding that has not been empirically determined previously in the literature. This study provides empirical evidence about the important role of HRM practices as a factor that can foster employee motivation to learn and ultimately employee motivation to transfer the training outcomes to their current task in organization.

6. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

This study has found that human resource management (HRM) practices in a public sector organization in Malaysia are positively related to employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. Thus, the management of organizations encourages to implement an effective approach in managing their employees. For example, provide an interesting remuneration scheme that based on the current living cost, organize employee training and development program to enhance employee job competencies, provide equal opportunity for employees to develop their career, and emphasize on work life balance in the organization. This study has proven that if organization implement these practices, they can enhance the employee motivation to learn the content of the training program, and ultimately improve employee desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their current task in organization at the end of the training program.

From the theoretical implication, this study provides empirical evidence of the direct effect of human resource management practices on motivation to transfer, particularly in the Malaysian public sector context. To the knowledge of the researcher, no studies have been conducted previously to empirically examine those associations, particularly in the Malaysian public sector organizations context. The result supports the importance of human resource management practices in producing positive work behavior found in other studies (Vanhala & Ahteela, 2011; Wheeler et al., 2010).

This study also extends the literature by providing empirical evidence about motivation to learn that acts as a mediator in the relationship between HRM practices and motivation to transfer. Finally, this study extends the discussion and understanding on factors that influence motivation to transfer based on the perspective of employee at non-Western context, which is public sector organizations in Malaysia, a developing country in Southeast Asia.

7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The sample in this study are employees in the public sector in Malaysia. Future research could examine the proposed conceptual framework of this study among employees at the different types of organization (e.g., the private sector) to validate the findings of this study.

Second, this study has included only four practices to represent the human resource management (HRM) practices, which based on current literature (Presbitero et al., 2016). The practices are known as remuneration, training and development, career development, and work life balance. Future studies could include additional practices to represent the HRM practices such as reward management, employee performance management, and occupational health and safety.

Finally, this study is limited to a single context, which is employees of the public sector in Malaysia. Future research is encouraged to validate the proposed framework of this study that include HRM practices, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer, in another context. It is due to every country is unique in terms of environmental characteristics and culture.

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