

Environmental Learning Factors and Employee Performance

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the employee's perception of environment learning transfer factors toward employee performance in Sabah hotel industry. This study employed quantitative approach and using the self-administered questionnaires through the survey to collect the data from the respondents. The sample size consists of 275 operational employees, especially food and beverage, housekeeping and front office departments. The data were analyzed by using the SmartPLS 2.0 software. The analyses were based on Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the measurement model and structural model. The findings suggested that supervisor support and openness to change have a significant relationship to employee performance. However, feedback and peer support have no significant relationship to employee performance. The research was measuring the work environment in learning transfer factors on employee performance among operational employees in Sabah Hotel Industry, which has not been covered in earlier studies.

Keywords: Learning transfer, Employee performance, Environment
JEL Codes:

1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the main economic sectors that have become the vital key growth for transforming Malaysia into a higher nation income and creating higher economic sustainability. The promotion of Malaysia as an attractive tourist destination and as a regional hub for trade and commerce leads to the expansion of the hotel and tourism is necessary (MIDA, 2015). Hence, hotel as an accommodation services are currently acknowledged as an important contributor to the nation's economy for now and the future. Hotels are aggressively increasing the promotional activities to attract and retain customer loyalty with its hotel due to the competitiveness of tourism supply and the dynamic of tourist demand.

According to Santoro (2015), the tourists would prefer to stay in the same destination due to the services provided by the local hotels. Hence, the employee is the vital of hotel resources by providing excellent services to the customers, which create favorable experiences of stays in a hotel and thus, improving its hotel performance. On top of that, formal and informal training could enhance employee performance where learning transfer occurs when they transfer what they have learned from training to the job.

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The environment learning transfer factors included feedback, peer support, supervisor support, openness to change and personal outcomes-positive could enhance employee performance (Holton III, Bates, and Ruona, 2000). Despite the environmental factors have only received little attention in the transfer literature, these factors have been suggested that it can create success or failure of the learning transfer and employees' decisions to apply their newly learned skills in a real workplace (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Chiaburu, Dam, and Hutchins, 2010; Tracey and Tews, 2005). Apart from that, this study attempts to emphasize the environment learning transfer factors that influence the employee performance by examining the relationship between feedback, peer support, supervisor support, openness to change, and employee performance.

2 Literature Review

The Concept Performance

The definition of performance has been defined in broadly concepts. Generally, performance can be distinguished between behavioral and an outcome aspect of performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Campbell, McCloy, Oppler and Sager, 1993; Roe, 1999). The behavioral aspect refers to what employees do that are relevant to the goals of the organization (Campbell, 1990). This performance concept only describes behavior, which is goal-oriented (Campbell et al., 1993). The outcome aspect, on the other hand, refers to the result of the individual's behavior (Sonnentag, Volmer and Spychala, 2010). This is in line with Kane and Lawler, (1979) defined the performance as a record of task achievement or outcomes such as productivity, profit growth, market share, customer satisfaction and quality improvement that can be effectively achieved for a certain period of time. Based on these varying definitions of performance, it was appearing generally concerned with behaviors and results.

Task and Contextual Performance

There are two dimensions have been paying attention on performance, which consists of task and contextual performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997; Motowidlo, Borman and Schmit, 1997; Motowidlo and Schmit, 1999). Task performance is defined as a person's contribution to organizational performance and addresses the requirements as specified in job descriptions (Williams and Karau, 1991). Task performance also defined as activities that transform materials into the goods and services produced by the organization (Motowidlo et al, 1997). Campbell, (1990) proposed five factors refer to task performance such as job-specific task proficiency; non-job-specific task proficiency; written and oral communication proficiency; supervision, in case of leadership position; and management/administration.

Contextual performance is defined as behavior that does not directly contribute to organizational performance, but supports the organizational, social and psychological environment, which indirectly contributes to an organization's performance by facilitating task performance (Sommentag et al., 2010). Borman and Motowidlo, (1993) specify five factors refer to contextual performance, such as volunteering for activities beyond a person's formal job requirements; persistence of enthusiasm and apply, when needed to complete important task requirements; assistance to others; following rules and prescribed procedures even when it is inconvenient; and openly defending organization objectives. For the purpose of this research, employee performance is regarded as a task and contextual performance that directly and indirectly to the organization performance.

Work Environmental Factors in Learning Transfer

Learning transfer is the most vital impact for the training effectiveness criteria that leads to improvement of employee performance (Bhatti and Kaur, 2010). It is defined as the degree to which employee applies the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained in training to their job (Wexley and Latham, 1991). Furthermore, Baldwin and Ford, (1988) defined learning transfer as the effect of having learned activities such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes from the training to the job in the sense that learned behavior must be generalized to the job and maintained over a period of time on the job for the effectiveness of training and development. Several researchers have identified the work environment factors that directly or indirectly affect the transfer of training in the real workplace (Bhatti, Battour, Sundram and Othman, 2013). The definition of work environment factors, which as perceived by employees can encourage or discourage the application of knowledge, skills and abilities learned from training to the real work environment (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004).

Hypotheses Development

Feedback defined as formal and informal indicators from an organization towards employee performance (Holton III, Bates and Ruona, 2000). Baldwin and Ford (1988), similarly, defined feedback as information about employee performance for further improvement. Furthermore, Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons and Kavanagh (2007), stated that providing the feedback after training could influence the learning transfer. Blume, Ford, Baldwin and Huang (2010), similarly, found that feedback is vital as one of the learning transfer factors, which provide them with performance knowledge. Previous studies found that feedback would increase or decrease employee performance (Kannappan, Yip, Lodhia, Morton and Lau, 2012; Dusek and O'Connell, 1973; Podsakoff and Farh, 1989). Therefore, this research attempts to test the following hypothesis:
H1: There is a significant relationship between feedback and employee performance.

Peer support defined as the extent to which peers reinforce and support the use of learning to the job (Holton III et al., 2000). According to Martin (2010), stated that great support from peer within the constructive workplace environment could have an achievement of greater performance improvement than those with less support from peers within an unconstructive environment. The other previous studies, however, argued that peer support has a significant influence of learning transfer (Hawley and Barnard, 2005; Bates, Holton, Seyler and Carvalho, 2000). Therefore, this research attempts to test the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant relationship between peer support and employee performance.

Supervisor support defined as the extent to which supervisors/managers support and reinforce use of training on the job (Holton III et al., 2000). Blume, Ford, Baldwin and Huang (2010) argued that supervisor support has a minimum being examined as a learning transfer factor although it is one of the most influential factors. Nevertheless, many previous scholars agreed that supervisor support plays an important role in the learning transfer as they encourage and motivate their employees to transfer knowledge and skills on the job (Broad and Newstrom, 1992; Birdi, Allan and Warr, 1997; Martin, 2010; Burke and Hutchins, 2007). This is also in line with other previous studies that supervisor support found to be a significant factor in the learning transfer (Ford, Quiñones, Segó and Sorra, 1992; Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Seyler, Holton III, Bates, Burnett and Carvalho, 1998; Bates, Holton III and Burnett, 1999; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004; Hawley and Barnard, 2005). Therefore, this research attempts to test the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a significant relationship between supervisor support and employee performance.

Openness to change defined as the extent to which prevailing group norms are perceived by trainees' to resist or discourage the use of skills and knowledge acquires in training (Holton III et al., 2000). Bates and Khasawneh (2005), on the other hand, defined openness to change as an individual's perception about his or her work group's disposition toward change, willingness to invest energy in change and the degree of support provided when trying to use new learning to change and improve work performance. Previous studies found that openness to change has links with the learning transfer (Goldstein and Ford, 2002; Holton III and Baldwin, 2003; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). On the other hand, Dodson (2004) found that openness to change has no significant influence on learning transfer. Therefore, this research attempts to test the following hypothesis:

H4: There is a significant relationship between openness to change and employee performance.

In this research, the conceptual framework was adapted based on Holton II et al., (2000)'s model. Figure 1 presents the environment learning transfer factors as independent variables and employee performance as the dependent variable. Holton III et al., (2000)'s model stated that the intervention of work environment could lead to the achievement of the learning outcomes desired and being applied on the job that resulting a change in employee performance where an achievement of greater

organizational performance as a consequence of the change in employee performance. Several studies have widely used Holton III et al., (2000)'s model to confirm the factors affecting learning transfer due to its ability to explain the training effectiveness, which improving the employee performance (Chen, 2003; Donovan, Hannigan and Crowe, 2001; Yamnill, 2001; Holton III et al., 2000).

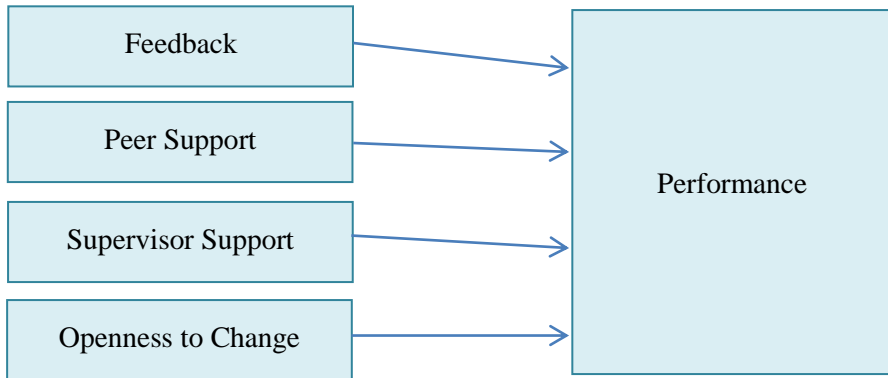


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

3 Methodology

Data were collected from operational employees within food and beverage, front office and housekeeping departments in Sabah hotel industry. The stratified random sampling technique is used in the selection of hotels. On the other hand, this research using non-probability sampling, a convenience sampling technique in the selection of respondents. Questionnaires through the survey are used as data collection instruments and distributed to operational employees randomly. The unit of analysis is individual, as operational employees of the star rated hotels. Out of the 331 questionnaires distributed to operational employees in star rated hotels, 275 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate 83 percent. The questionnaire items of feedback (4 items), peer support (4 items), supervisor support (4 items), and openness to change (4 items) were adapted from Baharim, (2008). On the other hand, the questionnaire items of employee performance (25 items) were adapted from Motowidlo and Van Scotter, (1994); Sriyam, (2010); and Borman and Motowidlo, (1993). The research used a five-point Likert scale in the survey instrument, which ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

4 Research Analysis and Results Introduction

The data were analyzed by using SmartPLS 2.0. The aim of this research is to analyze the significant predictors on endogenous variables, which PLS-SEM is the suitable approach and supports prediction-oriented goals as highlighted by previous researchers (Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011; Chin, 1998). Initially, model assessment focuses on the measurement model and the structural model. The validity and reliability of the measure were analyzed based on specific criteria associated with reflective measurement model. The structural model depicts the hypothesized relationships between work environment factors and employee performance.

Measurement Model

This research tests the convergence validity by assessing the loadings, AVE and composite reliability values as presented in Table 1. Many scholars have given different cutoff values on the factor loadings for items retention, which varies from 0.35 to 0.70 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998; Chin, Gopal and Salisbury, 1997; Hair et al., 2011). In this research, the loadings were all above cutoff value of 0.50, which considered as minimum acceptable value and significance. The recommended value for the composite reliability (CR), which is minimum value of 0.70 while the cronbach's alpha accepted at the recommended value of 0.70 (George and Mallery, 2003; Gefen, Straub and Boudreau, 2000; Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2010). In the average variance extracted (AVE), the acceptable value should exceed the recommended value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In this research, the composite reliability was all above cutoff value of 0.7; the cronbach's alpha was all above cutoff value of 0.7 and the average variance extracted was also all above 0.5 suggesting that the measurement items were reliable and valid.

Next, the discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted and the correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). They suggested that the square root of the AVE should exceed the squared correlations between the latent variable and all other latent variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Chin, 2010; Chin, 1998). Based on discriminant validity result, all the values in the diagonal are greater than other indicator variables in their respective rows and columns, thus indicating all indicators are good measures for their constructs as presented in Table 2.

Table 1 Measurement model

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>AVE^a</i>	<i>CR^b</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha (α)</i>
Feedback	LT22	0.826	0.732	0.916	0.877
	LT23	0.889			
	LT24	0.891			
	LT25	0.814			
Peer Support	LT26	0.887	0.807	0.943	0.920
	LT27	0.905			
	LT28	0.928			
	LT29	0.870			
Supervisor Support	LT30	0.893	0.795	0.939	0.913
	LT31	0.926			
	LT32	0.902			
	LT33	0.844			
Openness to Change	LT34	0.911	0.742	0.919	0.876
	LT35	0.928			
	LT36	0.923			
	LT37	0.651			

^aAverage Variance Extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

^bComposite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}

Note: P1 item in task performance and P20 item in contextual performance are deleted due to indicators loaded are lower than other indicator variables in the same block.

Table 2 Discriminant validity: Fornell-Lacker criterion

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Feedback</i>	<i>Openness to Change</i>	<i>Peer Support</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Supervisor Support</i>
Feedback	0.856				
Openness to Change	0.646	0.861			
Peer Support	0.727	0.734	0.898		
Performance	0.428	0.468	0.436	0.721	
Supervisor Support	0.599	0.657	0.577	0.447	0.892

Structural Model

The assessment of the structural model presents the coefficient of determination (R²) and the path coefficients of hypothesized relationships. The R² value is assessed based on assessment criterion suggested by Cohen, (1988) where 0.26 is considered as substantial, 0.13 moderate, and 0.02 weak. The R² provides an indication of the predictive ability of the independent variables (Henseler, Ringle and Sinkovics, 2009). In this research, the analysis showed that all the predictors only could explain 27% (R²=0.270) of the variance in performance.

The path coefficients show the significance level of hypothesized relationships among the constructs (Hair et al., 2011). The hypotheses of the research model were tested using the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples, which is

recommended guidelines from Hair et al., (2011). The significance testing results of the structural model as presented in Table 3. The analysis showed that out of the four hypotheses two (2) were supported (H3 and H4) and two (2) were not supported (H1 and H2). In other words, H3 was supported to suggest that supervisor support has the significance on employee performance ($\beta=0.194$; $t\text{-value}=2.735$). For H4, openness to change further has significance on employee performance ($\beta=0.195$; $t\text{-value}=2.194$). For H1, feedback has no significance on employee performance ($\beta=0.115$; $t\text{-value}=1.391$) and for H2, peer support also has found no significance on employee performance ($\beta=0.098$; $t\text{-value}=1.120$).

Table 3 Significance testing results of the structural model

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Std. Beta</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t-value^a</i>
H1	Feedback --> Perf	0.115	0.083	1.391
H2	Peer Support --> Perf	0.098	0.087	1.120
H3	Supervisor Support --> Perf	0.194	0.071	2.735**
H4	Openness to Change --> Perf	0.195	0.089	2.194*

*Significant at $p<0.05$; **Significant at $p<0.01$

^aNotes: (t(4999), One tailed test: $t(0.05; 4999)=1.65$; $t(0.01;4999)=2.33$)

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The results suggested that key work environment of learning transfer factors was supervisor support and openness to change, which can improve employee performance. Specifically, once an employee perceives supervisor or manager provides support, coaching and mentoring, he or she will apply what they have learned from the training. Thus, supervisor support influence the ability of learning transfer and it will increase the employee performance. The result also suggested that employees perceive that his or her work group has the willingness to change and accept the use of skills and knowledge acquired in training, which improve employee performance. These results are consistent with previous learning transfer studies toward performance.

The result, on the other hand, showed that feedback and peer support were found not significantly on employee performance. As discussed by previous studies, the feedback has less influence on employee performance when the employees perceive less or negative feedback in terms of advice and comments on their performance, which caused them have no knowledge about what need to be improved or to which extent they have improved compared with previous performance. Furthermore, employees perceived that the peer was not reinforced and supported the use of learning to the job. The possible explanation could be the culture work environment with less peer support has led to the insignificant relationship between peer support and employee performance as supported by previous studies that postulated insignificant relationship between peer support and employee performance.

The understandings of work environment in learning transfer factors are vital for an organization, especially hotel industry to improve employee performance. Based on the present research findings, this suggested that the model provided the insights for the importance of work environment factors to training effectiveness in leaning transfer context. This research had some limitations that could be addressed in future studies. The data collection was limited to Sabah and one source rating of questionnaires, which only focused on operational employees. In future studies, researchers should include other geographical areas to make more generalizations from the data. Furthermore, future studies should include the multisource ratings such as operational employees and supervisor to explore alternative explanations for the results.

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