FAN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSIGNMENT PRACTICES IN TRAINING PROGRAMS AND TRAINING MOTIVATION

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between training assignment and training motivation using self-report questionnaires collected from cadet officers in a military training academy, Malaysia. The outcomes of testing hypothesis using a stepwise regression analysis showed two important findings: firstly, mandatory assignment is significantly correlated with training motivation. Secondly, voluntary assignment is also significantly correlated with training motivation. This result demonstrates that training assignment practices act as important predictors of training motivation in the studied organization. In addition, this paper elaborates discussion, implications and conclusion.

Key words: Mandatory assignment; voluntary assignment; training motivation

1. Introduction

Training is an important function of human resource management where it often is implemented to train and retrain employees in order to meet an employer's expectation (Azman and Nurul Inani, 2010; Noe, 2010). In organizations, training

programs are shared tasks where human resource departments will discuss and liaison with the line managers who know the needs of their respective departments and suggest the types of training that benefit to their workers (Maimunah, 2008; 2010; Noe *et al*., 2009; Vodde, 2012). At the early stage of training development, many employers have designed types of training programs to develop basic skills and apply them to overcome immediate job problems and increase daily job performance (Goldstein and Ford, 2002; Noe, 2010; Azman and Nurul Inani, 2010; Liu, 2012;). In an era of global economy, most employers have shifted their directions from a traditional based training to intellectual capital based training in order support the organizational strategic vision and mission (DeSimone *et al.,* 2002; Ellinger *et al.,* 2005; Noe, 2010). Under this perspective, training programs have been designed to enable workers mastering basic skills (e.g., skills needed to performing a particular job) and advanced skills (e.g., how to use technology to share information with other workers) to understand the service or product development systems, and to share knowledge and to creatively use it to modify products or improve customer services. The ability of management to implement such training programs may lead to gain a competitive advantage in dynamic marketplace (Noe, 2010; Chan and Cameron, 2011; Weissbein *et al.* 2011).

A recent organizational training literature highlights that well-designed training programs will not be able to achieve their objectives if management cannot properly practice training assignments in organizations (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Kinuthia, 2005; Azman *et al*., 2009). Training assignment is often related to the capability of management to make two types of important decisions: mandatory assignment and voluntary assignment (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Azman *et al*., 2009). Mandatory assignment is often viewed as a compulsory training assignment where employees have no choice or excuse, but to attend the training programs that are instructed to them. This assignment is usually conducted by managers because they feel that it is crucial for employees to attend such very important training programs to create the awareness amongst employees and give them the necessary training and knowledge to help achieve the main organizational strategies and goals (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Machin and Treloar, 2004; Azman *et al*., 2009;   Kylesten and Nählinder, 2011;). Voluntary assignment is often seen as an alternative training assignment while employees will have the power to decide on whether they willingly agree to attend or not to attend the training programs that are assigned to them. This assignment is implemented by managers because they feel that employees would know better which training programs are really useful and beneficial to them in helping the managers to achieve the organizational strategy and goals (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Saks and Belcourt, 2006; Azman *et al*., 2009; Chan and Cameron, 2011).

Surprisingly, a thorough investigation about training program reveals that the ability of management to properly implement such training assignment practices will be able to increase employees' understanding about the advantages of attending, learning and participating on-the-job and off-the-job training programs. As a result, it may lead to an enhanced training motivation in organizations (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Azman *et al.,* 2009). According to many scholars like Analoui (1999), Gross and Leslie (2008) and

Azman *et al.* (2009) view training motivation as individuals who have high motivation, internal needs and/or desire to attend, learn and involve in training program. Within a training program model, many scholars think that mandatory assignment, voluntary assignment, and training motivation are distinct, but highly interrelated constructs. For example, the ability of management to properly implement mandatory and voluntary assignments may strongly motivate employees to attend and learn necessary knowledge, up to date skills, new capabilities, and positive attitudes in training programs (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Azman *et al.,* 2009; Klaus, Ramin and Finn, 2011).

Although this relationship has been studied, the role of assignment practices in training assignment as an important predicting variable is less emphasized in training management research literature (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Kinuthia, 2005; Azman *et al.,* 2009). Many scholars reveal that the role of assignment practices in training program is given less emphasis in previous studies because they have focused on the conceptual debates about training assignment features and given little attention on measuring the effect size of assignment practices in training programs on training motivation in organizations. As a result, findings of studies using this approach have not presented sufficient evidence to practitioners in order to make suitable strategies for improving the effectiveness of training assignment in dynamic organizations (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Kinuthia, 2005; Azman *et al.,* 2009). This situation motivates the researchers to fill in the gap of the related literature by highlighting the magnitude and nature of the relationship between assignment practices in training programs (i.e., mandatory and voluntary) and training motivation.

2.   Literature Review

Several previous studies used a direct effects model to investigate training assignments using different samples. For example, Kinuthia (2005) studied about web-based instruction training based on 152 respondents gathered from Black Colleges and Universities in southern USA and found that the implementation of mandatory assignment had decreased trainee motivation and voluntary assignment had increased trainee motivations in the organizations. Besides that, Gross and Leslie (2008) examined Web 2.0 learning based on more than 30 staff at an Australian university and showed that implementation of mandatory assignment had increased staff motivation in the organization. Further, empirical evidence supporting the effect on both of mandatory and voluntary assignments on training motivation is shown by two studies: firstly, a survey conducted by Tsai and Tai (2003) based on a sample of 184 employees belonging to 18 banks who attended government-sponsored training programs in Taiwan, and secondly, a survey administered by Azman *et al.* (2009) using a sample of 100 employees in a city based authority in Malaysia. Findings from these studies revealed that implementation of both mandatory and voluntary assignments had increased trainees' motivation to attend and learn necessary knowledge, up-to-date skills, new abilities and positive attitudes in the organizational training programs (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Azman *et al.,* 2009).

These studies are consistent with the notion of motivation theory. For example, Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs clearly explains that needs are essential motivating factors that positively or negatively influence individuals' behavior in organizations. Besides, Adams' (1963, 1965) equity theory posits that fair or unfair treatment toward employees in allocating outcomes may affect individuals' actions in organizations. Thus, Vrooms' (1964) expectancy theory reveals that individuals will act if they understand and appreciate the value of outcomes. Application of these theories in a training management shows that the ability of managers to properly implement mandatory and voluntary assignments may invoke employees understanding about the significance of attending and learning necessary knowledge, latest skills, new ability and positive attitudes in training programs (Tsai and Tai, 2003; Kinuthia, 2005; Gross and Leslie, 2008; Azman *et al.,* 2009).

The literature has been used as a platform of developing a conceptual framework for this study as shown in Figure 1.
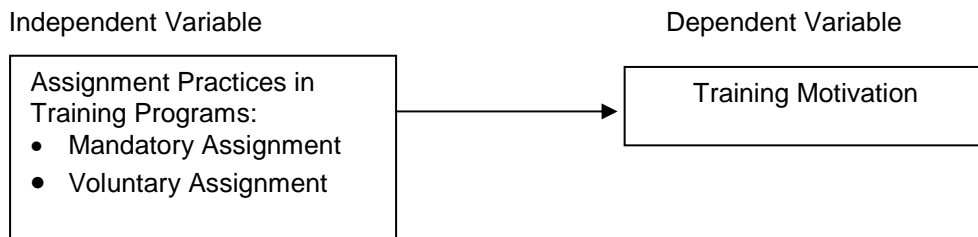
Independent Variable   Dependent Variable

| Assignment Practices in Training Programs: • Mandatory Assignment • Voluntary Assignment | → | Training Motivation |

Figure 1:   Conceptual Framework

Based on the framework, it was hypothesized that:

H1:   There is a positive relationship between mandatory assignment and training motivation.

H2:   There is a positive relationship between voluntary assignment and training motivation.

3.   Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional research design that allowed the researchers to integrate training program literature, the in-depth interview, the pilot study and the actual survey as a main procedure to gather data for this study. Using such methods may improve the inadequacy of single method and increase the ability to gather accurate data, decrease bias and increase quality of data being collected (Cresswell, 1998; Azman *et al.*, 2010; Sekaran and Bougie, 2011). The location of this study is a military training academy in Malaysia. For confidential reasons, the name of this organization is kept anonymous. This training center is a body which is responsible to perform the documentation process when receiving new intake, commissioning and administration for the Battalion and training cadet officers in line with the criteria set up by the Ministry of Defense, Malaysia.

At the initial stage of data collection, the in-depth interviews were conducted involving one military officer, one first year cadet officer, one second year cadet officer and one third year cadet officer. They were selected based on purposive sampling where they have good knowledge and experiences in training programs. Purposive sampling technique has been used in order to find those who are experienced and able to provide all necessary information. Besides purposive sampling, snowball sampling technique was also carried out when the participants introduced some of their colleagues who were willing to be interviewed by the researchers. Ultimately, the sample should comprise of those who are able to provide all necessary information on issues to be studied (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998).

Researchers began the initial analysis of data immediately after the first interview was conducted by analyzing and building categories and themes and then followed with the next interview (Mohd Mursyid *et al.*, 2010). Researchers also conducted each interview at the convenience of the informants. During the interview session, they had opportunity to stop and continue the session again based on the willingness of the informants. Data were collected until achieving saturation point of information. Transcribing of the interview session has been viewed and examined several times; at least twice. The information gathered from the interview method helped the researchers to understand the training assignment characteristics and training motivation elements, as well as relationship between such variables in the studied organization. This information gathered from the interview was transcribed, categorized and compared with the relevant training program literature. Next, the triangulated outcomes were used as a guideline to develop the content and format of the survey questionnaire for a pilot study. Thus, a pilot study was done by discussing the importance, relevance, clarity and suitability of questionnaires with the interviewed participants. Their opinions were sought to verify the content and format of survey questionnaire for an actual study. Back translation technique was used to translate the survey questionnaires in order to increase the validity and reliability of research findings (Cresswell, 1998; Sekaran and Bougie, 2011).

The survey questionnaire used in this study had two sections. Firstly, mandatory assignment had 7 items and voluntary assignment had 5 items that were adapted from training assignment literature (Ryman and Biersner, 1975; Mathieu and Martineau, 1997; Tsai and Tai, 2003; Azman *et al.*, 2009; Tai, 2006; Noe, 2010). Next, training motivation was measured using 7 items that were modified from training motivation literature (Axtell and Maitlis, 1997; Tsai and Tai, 2003; Rodrigues and Gregory, 2005; Tai, 2006; Azman *et al.*, 2009; Noe, 2010). All items used in the questionnaires were measured using a 7-item scale ranging from "strongly disagree/dissatisfied" (1) to "strongly agree/satisfied" (7). Demographic variables were used as controlling variables because this study focuses on employee attitudes.

The population of this study is cadet officers who actively study in a military training academy, Malaysia. The researchers had obtained an official approval to conduct the study from the head of the organization and also received advice from him about the procedures of conducting the survey in this organization. Despite the

permission granted to the researchers to conduct this study, the list and information details of cadets were not given to the researchers because of confidentiality reason. This situation could not enable the researchers to select randomly respondents for this study. Considering the constraints of the organization's rules and regulations, duration of study and budget, the survey questionnaires were distributed using a convenient sampling technique to 150 cadet officers in the organization. From the number, 126 usable questionnaires were returned to the researchers, yielding 84 percent of the response rate. The survey questionnaires were answered by participants voluntarily, based on their consent. The number of this sample exceeds the minimum sample of 30 participants as required by probability sampling technique, showing that it may be analyzed using inferential statistics (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011).

A Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 was used to analyze the data. Firstly, exploratory factor analysis was employed to assess the validity and reliability of the research instrument (Nunally and Bernstein, 1994; Coakes and Steed, 2002; Hair *et al.,* 2006). Secondly, Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics were conducted to determine the collinearity problem and estimate the validity and reliability of research constructs (Hair *et al.,* 2006; Azman *et al.*, 2009). Finally, stepwise regression analysis was used to quantify the magnitude and direction of many independent variables and one dependent variable in the hypothesized model (Berenson and Levine, 1992; Foster *et al.,* 1998; Azman *et al.,* 2009). In this regression analysis, standardized coefficients (standardized beta) were used for all analyses.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows that majority of respondents were males (77%), and those whose age fall between 20 and 21 years old contributed to the highest percentage (61.1%), first year students (34.1%) and second year students (31.1%), Malay race (95.2%), and groups who attended theoretical and practical training (69.8%).

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics (n=129)

Respondent Profile	Sub-profile	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	77.0
	Female	23.0
Age	Below than 19 years old	3.2
	20 to 21 years old	61.1
	22 to 23 years old	27.8
	24 to 25 years old	7.9
Year of Study	1st Year	34.1
	2nd Year	34.1
	3nd Year	31.7

Race	Malay	95.2
	Chinese	2.4
	Indian	2.4
Type of Training	Theory	30.2
	Theory and Practical	69.8

Table 2 shows that the survey questionnaires had 19 items which refer to three variables: mandatory assignment (7 items), voluntary assignment (5 items) and training motivation (7 items). The validity and reliability analyses were conducted based on the procedures established by Nunally and Berstein (1994) and Hair *et al.* (2006). A principal component factor analysis with oblique rotation using direct oblimin was first conducted to determine the possible dimensions of the constructs. Further, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test (KMO), which is a measure of sampling adequacy, was conducted for each variable.

These statistical results showed that (1) all items for each variable had factor loading values of 0.5 and above, indicating that the items met the acceptable standard of validity analysis; (2) all research variables exceeded the minimum standard of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's value of 0.6 and were significant in Bartlett's test of sphericity, indicating that the sample was adequate to further conduct the factor and reliability analyses; (3) all research variables had eigenvalues larger than 1 and had variance explained larger than 0.45, showing that the variables met the acceptable standard of validity analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2006); and (4) all variables had alpha values greater than 0.70, signifying that the variables met the acceptable standard of reliability analysis (Nunally and Bernstein, 1994). These statistical results showed that the measurement scales used in this study met the standards of validity and reliability analyses as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Validity and Reliability Analyses

Measures	Item	Factor Loadings	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Cronbach Alpha
Mandatory Assignment	7	.66 to .87	.89	577.49	4.59	65.57	.91
Voluntary Assignment	5	.57 to .85	.67	317.70	3.00	60.02	.83
Training Motivation	7	.76 to .91	.79	626.07	4.20	59.98	.91

Table 3 shows the results of Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics. The means for all variables vary from 4.8 to 5.6, signifying that the levels of mandatory assignment, voluntary assignment, and training motivation are ranging from high (4.0) to highest level (7). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., mandatory and voluntary assignments) and the mediating variable (i.e., feel importance), and the relationship between the mediating

variable (i.e., feel importance) and the dependent variable (i.e., training motivation) were less than 0.90, indicating the data were not affected by serious collinearity problem (Hair *et al.,* 2006). Thus, these statistical results provide further evidence of validity and reliability for the measurement scales used in this research.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Pearson Correlation Coefficients (r)		
			1	2	3
1. Mandatory Assignment	5.6	.70	(1)		
2. Voluntary Assignment	4.8	1.0	.202[*]	(1)	
3. Training Motivation	5.5	.80	.274[**]	.445[**]	(1)

Note: Significant at *p<0.05;**p< 0.01

Reliability Estimation is showed in a parenthesis

Table 4 shows the results of testing hypotheses using a stepwise regression analysis. It shows that demographic variables were entered in Step 1 and then followed by entering independent variables (i.e., mandatory and voluntary assignments) in Step 2. Training motivation was used as the dependent variable. An examination of multi collinearity in the regression analysis shows that the tolerance values for the relationship between the independent variables (i.e., motivational motive and punishment motive) and the dependent variable (i.e., training motivation) were 0.91 and 0.77, respectively. These tolerance values were more than the tolerance value of .20 (as a rule of thumb), indicating that the variables were not affected by multi collinearity problems (Fox, 1991).

Table 4: The Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis

Variable	Dependent Variable (Training Motivation)	
	Step 1	Step 2
Controlling Variable Gender	.08	.05
Year of Study	-.12	-.18*
Age	.20*	.11
Race	-.09	.11
Type of Training	-.15	-.10
Dependent Variable **Mandatory Assignment**		**.17***
Voluntary Assignment		**.46***
R Square	.07	.29
Adjusted R Square	.03	.24

R Square Change	.07	.21
F	1.87	6.74***
F Change R Square	1.87	17.61***

Note: Significant at *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$

Table 4 shows the results of testing hypotheses in Step 2. Firstly, mandatory assignment positively and significantly correlated with training motivation ($ß=0.17$, $p<0.05$), therefore H1 was fully supported. Secondly, voluntary assignment positively and significantly correlated with training motivation ($ß=0.46$, $p<0.001$), therefore H2 was fully supported. In terms of explanatory power, the inclusion of these variables in Step 2 had explained 29 percent of the variance in dependent variable. This result confirms that assignment practices in training programs act as important predictors of training motivation in the studied organization.

5. Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study confirm that assignment practices in training programs act as important predictors of training motivation in the studied organization. In the organizational context, management has implemented planned mandatory and voluntary assignments based on the standard operating procedures in order to motivate cadet officers attending and learning necessary knowledge, up-to-date skills, new abilities and positive attitudes in training programs. According to the interviewed participants, levels of mandatory assignment, voluntary assignment and training motivation level are high in training programs. This situation shows that the readiness of management to appropriately practice mandatory and voluntary assignments has increased cadet officers' motivation to attend and learn in training programs.

The implications of this study can be divided into three categories: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and practical contribution. In terms of theoretical contribution, the findings of this study highlight that mandatory and voluntary assignments act as important predictors of training motivation in the studied organization. This result is consistent with studies by Tsai and Tai (2003), Kinuthia (2005), Gross and Leslie (2008), and Azman *et al.* (2009). The results of testing hypothesis were significant, but the effect size of assignment practices in training programs on training motivation was low. Information gathered from the in-depth interviews reveals that this result may be caused by external factors. Firstly, the sample profile shows that respondents have unequal characteristics and this situation may motivate them to put different rating about the capability of management to practice training assignments in the organization. Secondly, the respondents have unequal preferences and values, feelings of usefulness and ease to follow instructions, self-efficacy and honesty in doing job. These human factors may be potential factors that decrease the effect size of training assignment practices on training motivation in the studied organization.

With respect to the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaire used in this study has met the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses; this may lead to the production of accurate and reliable findings. In terms of practical contributions, the findings of this study can be used to improve the design and administration of training and development program in cadet training organizations. These objectives will be realized if managers consider the following aspects: firstly, update training content and methods. For example, current training contents need to emphasize on developing cadet competencies in terms of cognitive, emotion and good moral values than solving technical and daily management problems. Application of such competencies can be enhanced if management identify and overcome the weaknesses and optimize the strengths of individual cadets. Secondly, strengthen recruitment policy. For example, management needs to give more priority in recruiting cadets based on emotion and cognitive compentencies besides academic qualifications. This recruitment policy may help to hire good candidates who may be trained to meet future important positions in military organizations. Thirdly, adjust performance appraisal system. For example, current performance appraisal needs to use performance ratings as a mean to develop the capability of cadets in learning necessary knowledge, up-to-date skills, new abilities, and positive attitudes than physical skills. This appraisal system will motivate cadets to use multiskillings in performing their duties and responsibilities after graduating from the military colleges. If these suggestions are seriously considered they may help to support the military training academy strategic vision and mission.

6. Conclusion

This study used a conceptual framework that was developed based on the training assignment research literature. The results of exploratory analysis confirmed that the measurement scale used in this study met the acceptable standards of reliability analysis. Further, the outcomes of stepwise regression analysis showed that training assignment (i.e., mandatory and voluntary assignments) did act as important predictors of training motivation in the studied organizations. This result has also supported training assignment literature mostly published in Western countries. Interestingly, the results of testing hypothesis were significant, although the effect size of assignment practices on training motivation was low. Consequently, the results may be affected by external factors, like different respondents' characteristics have unequal respondents' preferences and values, feelings of usefulness and ease to follow instructions, self-efficacy and honesty in doing job. Therefore, current research and practice within the training assignment model needs to consider mandatory and voluntary assignments as critical elements of the workplace training system. This study further suggests that the ability of management to properly implement mandatory and voluntary assignments will strongly motivate employees to attend, learn and involve in training programs. Further, these positive outcomes may increase their motivation to defend the national security and sovereignty.

7. References

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