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ENHANCING CONTINUOUS LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RAUB DISTRICT IN PAHANG

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**ENHANCING CONTINUOUS LEARNING:
A CASE STUDY OF FOUR SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN RAUB DISTRICT IN PAHANG**

BY

MERIAM BT ALLIAS

**A RESEARCH PROJECT PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MANAGEMENT**

**MANAGEMENT CENTER
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ABSTRACT

This research describes both conceptually and empirically, how salient aspects of an organization's (i.e. the school's) work environment can influence continuous learning to occur. For this purpose, a quantitative survey was carried out among teachers in four secondary schools in Raub district in the state of Pahang. Survey results from 112 teachers revealed that different schools have unique learning profiles and rely on different sources of learning to develop individual competencies. Several common learning environment factors were empirically identified. These factors were found to be related to perceived competence, training being viewed positively and satisfaction with development across the schools. This study suggested that with periodical diagnosis of individual school's learning environments, policies, practices, strategies, and culture could the schools hope to develop interventions that would capitalize on their strengths and mitigate their weaknesses.

APPROVAL PAGE

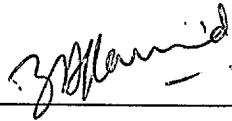
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The undersigned certify that the above candidate has fulfilled the condition of the project paper prepared in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Management.

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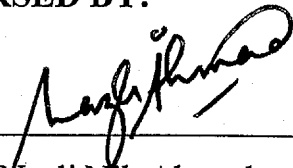
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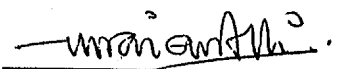
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project paper is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Reference notes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended acknowledge other sources.

Date: 30 November 1998

Signature: 

Name: MERIAM BT ALLIAS

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DEDICATIONS

Specially dedicated to my loving husband,
Mohamad Nasir Bin Hj Mohd Jam,
who has given his moral support and encouragement.

To my mother,
Hajjah Hamidah Hj Anie,
my most cherished learning source.

And to my sister,
Fatimah Hj Allias,
for being there when I need her.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Organizational learning was one of the few sustainable competitive advantages (Rosenblum and Keller, 1994; Veale, Oliver and Van Langen, 1995) over rival organizations. Organizations could only learn when the individuals employed within the organizations were continuously learning. While individual learning and personal competence did not ensure that organizational learning would occur, organizational learning could not occur in the absence of individual learning. Organizations that stifled learning or hindered the applications of new skills risked individual and organizational stagnation (Tannenbaum, 1997).

The work environment could have a powerful, tangible effect on the extent to which newly acquired skills were used on the job (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Tannenbaum and Yukl, 1992). Their studies had shown that even when people acquired new expertise through training, their work environment could determine whether that translated into changed behavior on the job.

For expenditures spent on training to be fruitful, organizations must ensure that their employees continually learned from an appropriate mix of sources – training and otherwise – and that the work environment encourages the acquisition and application of new skills and ideas (Tannenbaum, 1997).

In the educational department, teaching staffs have been emphasized to adopt continuous learning. While students are guided through lifelong education, teachers must always upgrade their knowledge so as to catch up with the advancement of technology. The question remains, how far has the Ministry of

Education provided the conducive environment suited for continuous learning? Granted that professional courses are given from time to time where certain teaching models are incorporated and a small group of teachers are selected to undergo the short-term courses. When the participants return to their respective schools, the heads of the schools should make sure that the newly acquired knowledge is practiced and circulated among the whole family of teachers or among particular groups of teachers in the school. Subsequently, the principal should comply to the teachers' demand for certain materials or equipment required carrying out the learning program.

1.2 Problem Statement

Some principals are very enthusiastic about providing the best for the school and carefully manipulates the tight budget to meet the teachers' requirement. Such conditions would definitely trigger teachers with new ideas and renewed energy to develop better teaching materials and procedures, and thus enhance their own personal learning.

On the other hand, some principals are less inclined to know the details of the school, especially the welfare of the teachers and the conducive environment for continuous education. Teachers are required to accomplish among others; going to class, imparting knowledge in the best way possible to students to achieve higher grades, doing lots of clerical work --- filling in forms and students' record books, preparing suitable teaching materials so as to attract students' interests in learning, checking students' exercise books, filing students' progress in multiple forms, recording every single information or program carried out, preparing and cyclostyling tests papers --- and many others. But when teachers request for

computers to be installed in the staffroom, the management resists. Requests for air-conditioning in the congested staffroom was met with the management announcing shortage of budget. Ideas proposed during staff meetings are turned down. Although the principal enquires for new ideas, his or her own ideas are finally used, regardless of whether the teachers agreed or not. This kind of attitude leads to stagnation of teachers' progress and finally most teachers prefer to exhibit a low profile, and continue with their weekly routine. Unbelievable but surprisingly true especially for some rural schools where the principal would attend to more pressing matters than to entertain the staffs' plea for a more active learning organization.

1.3 Research Objectives

Among the objectives of this study are, firstly to determine the probable factors that facilitate continuous learning among teachers in the school organization. Secondly, to compare learning environments between rural and semi-urban secondary schools. Thirdly, to identify the learning environments that enhances continuous learning.

1.4 Research Questions

This paper examines the learning environment empirically. It addresses several questions:

- What are the factors that facilitate continuous learning?
- Based on empirical data from 4 secondary schools, are there significant differences in learning environments? Do teachers in the rural and semi-

urban areas acquire competence through similar sources? What do some learning environments look like?

- Collectively, what can a diagnosis of the learning environment reveal about enhancing continuous learning?

1.5 Hypotheses Statements

Align below are the hypotheses based on previous researches and the supporting statements by previous researchers on similar subject. Nonetheless, the previous researches were surveyed in different organizations based on conceptual and empirical studies.

Hypothesis 1: There is significant difference in learning environment between schools.

Hypothesis 2: There is significant difference in the ways in which individuals acquire expertise at each school.

Hypothesis 3: The nature of the learning environments and how individuals acquire expertise is positively correlated to the outcomes of a strong continuous learning environment.

Table 1: Summary of Learning Environment Scales and Related Studies

(Tannenbaum, 1997)

No.	Scales	Supporting Statements by previous researchers
1	Awareness of the big picture	"Individuals are aware of the big picture" (Senge, 1991).
		<i>An awareness of the big picture can help individuals align their personal goals and development with the organization's goals, enabling them to choose appropriate experiences for both personal and organizational success (Tannenbaum, 1997)</i>
2	Assigns to provide opportunities to learn	"Individuals are assigned tasks where they can apply what they have learned and where they are stretched and challenged" (Dubin, 1990).
		<i>Lack of opportunity to apply new skills not only reduces subsequent motivation to learn, it also leads to skill decay as trained skills can atrophy through disuse (Pentland, 1959).</i>
3	Tolerates mistakes as part of learning	"Mistakes are tolerated during learning and early application when individuals are trying new ideas and skills." (Gundry, Kickul, and Prather, 1994; Sitkin, 1991)
	and assigns to avoid errors	<i>In some organizations, tasks are assigned strictly to avoid the likelihood of mistakes and never promote learning. This organizational aversion to risk can send the message that mistakes are unacceptable, thus fear can inhibit learning, initiative, and innovation (Suarez, 1994).</i>
4	Accountability high performance expectations	"Individuals are accountable for learning and performance expectations are high enough to necessitate continued personal growth" (Rosow and Zager, 1988).
		<i>Accountability and high performance expectations send the message that learning is an essential part of being successful. It also implies that someone takes notice when individuals apply new skills and ideas to solve problems, service customers, etc. (Tannenbaum, 1997).</i>
5	Minimum situational constraints	"Situational constraints to learning and performance are identified and minimized." (Schoorman and Schneider, 1988; Peters and O'Connor, 1980).

		<i>Constraints such as unclear tasks assignments, lack of tools and supplies, insufficient personnel, poorly skilled workers, and unrealistic time pressures can directly interfere with the ability to apply newly acquired skills (Schoorman and Schneider, 1988; Peters and O'Connor, 1980). They can disrupt learning cycle because trainees who perceive many situational constraints in their jobs enter training with lower motivation to learn and reduced self-efficacy (Mathieu, Martinieu and Tannenbaum, 1993; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, and Salas, 1992). There is little incentive to learn new skills if one believes those skills cannot be applied.</i>
6	Open to new ideas	<i>"New ideas are valued and encouraged." (Gundry et al., 1994).</i>
		<i>Thinking, problem solving and offering suggestions are not solely management's responsibilities but are part of everyone's role (Gundry et al., 1994).</i>
7	Social support	<i>"Supervisors and coworkers provide support allowing individuals to learn and attempt to implement new ideas (Dubin, 1990; Tracey, Tannenbaum, and Kavanagh, 1995).</i>
		<i>Social support has been shown to be extremely strong influence on learning effectiveness (Rouillier and Goldstein, 1993; Tracey et al., 1995).</i>
8	Training policies and practices	<i>"Policies and practices support the effective use of training." (Goldstein, 1993).</i>
		<i>Appropriate training policies and practices should enhance continuous learning. Providing accurate communications about training opportunities help ensure that opportunities are available, relevant, and applicable to the job. They also help ensure that trainers expectations about training will be met which has been shown to enhance post-training commitment, self efficacy, and motivation (Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers, 1991).</i>

1.6 The Scope of Research

Continuous learning is basically quite a new field of thought in Malaysia and emphasized quite a lot lately by the present Minister of Education for educators to nurture in their personal being. Thus, the study was done on teachers to investigate whether teachers had been responsive and whether the heads of the schools complied

with the policy by providing suitable accommodation to enhance the learning activities. The study was conducted on teachers of different school environments and geographical area in Raub District in Pahang.

1.7 Importance of the Study

1.7.1 Challenge

Firstly, teachers are facing the challenging and changing demands of advanced technology through the Multimedia Super Corridor network and it is appropriate that teachers should be well-learned and continuously learning so as to be more efficient, knowledgeable, and confident. This study provides the grounds for conducive continuous learning processes as a guide to the teachers in their pursuit for self-efficacy.

1.7.2 Application

The results of this study will guide school principals to recognize the probable factors that enable them to provide the necessary tools and grounds to initiate continuous learning among the staffs. As such, there will arise a school of well-learned staffs to avert any potential in-teaching crisis.

1.8 Terminology

The continuous learning and training literatures were repleted with jargon, sometimes different terms had been used to describe similar phenomena (Tannenbaum, 1997). Since there was not a universally accepted definition for each term, Table 2 defines how several common terms are used throughout this study.

Table 2: Definition of Terms (Tannenbaum, 1997)

Term	Definition	Examples
Organizational learning	A change in an organization's capacity for doing something new.	An organization is better able to avert a potential crisis as a result of learning from past experience.
Individual learning	The acquisition of a new knowledge, skills, or attitude (i.e. competencies) that enhances an individual's capacity for action.	The teachers are better able to solve the students' problem because they have learned how to display empathy.
Continuous learning	The process by which individual and/or organizational learning is fostered on an ongoing basis.	Ongoing learning is encouraged through an organization's training policies and practices, rewards systems, etc.
Work environment	The physical, social, and psychological conditions that individuals experience at work.	Workstation layout: peer relations, work demands, organizational policies.
Learning environment	Those salient aspects of the work environment, which have the greatest influence on whether learning, occur.	Supervisor (School management team) and peer support, resource availability, task assignments, rewards.
Learning experience	Any event or series for which learning is at least one of the intended consequences.	Training sessions: coaching, participation on a task force, peer feedback.

1.9 Organization of the Project Paper

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter discusses the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, the importance of the study, and the definition of terms used.

Chapter two deals with the review of the literature. It discusses the different terms of continuous learning and what it entails, the learning cycle, the learning environment, the influence of change, technological developments and learning styles in the organization, and the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter three outlines the research design, research subjects, research instrument, and data collection techniques and data analysis techniques.

Chapter four is devoted to data analysis. This chapter examines respondents' perceptions to the present learning environment in their respective work place, and evaluation of demographic characteristics of the respondents. Finally, a hypothesis test is carried out to see its validity.

Chapter five provides the discussion and conclusion as well as implications of the study. In this chapter, major findings are discussed. This is followed by a discussion on the limitations of the study, and future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Different Terms of Continuous Learning

Not long ago, one would commit oneself to a job and do it. Now, everyone is expected to be committed to a job, do it --- and learn from it. Helping employees learn how to learn on the job has become a pressing concern for progressive organizations. These days, everyone is telling us how to learn at work.

Baskett (1994) wrote, "Donald Schon tells you to be a *reflective practitioner*. For Stephen Brookfield, *critical reflection* is the ticket. Chris Argyris and his colleagues say *action science* will do the trick, Reg Revans calls for *action learning*, and Victoria Marsick and her colleagues suggest *action-reflection learning*. More recently, Peter Senge has prescribed *systems thinking* and Calhoun Wick and Lu Leon have recommended that you get *S.M.A.R.T.* about learning."

Tannenbaum (1997) found that continuous learning and training literatures were repleted with jargon. Sometimes different terms had been used to describe similar phenomena because there was not a universally accepted definition for each term. The continuous learning could be organizational learning, individual learning, work environment, learning environment, or learning experience.

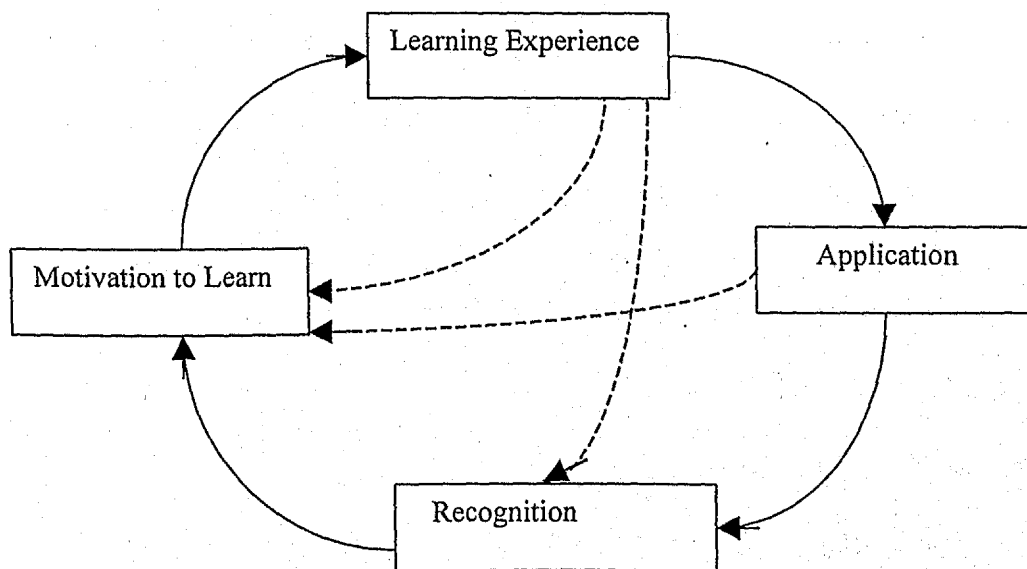
Baskett (1994) implied that the ability to learn was the basis for all other skills. It was what distinguished effective employees from less-effective employees. Learning meant more than attending company training sessions and reading books. People learned more lessons, and the most important lessons were from experience (Baskett, 1994). Baskett continued to say that organizations must prepared employees.

to turn common events into learning opportunities and how to create their own custom-designed, just-in-time learning systems. That did not mean that the organization should forsake formal training. Course work and formal training sessions could effectively promote learning --- if the curriculum related closely to the actual work.

2.2 The Learning Cycle

From Tannenbaum's (1997) research, at the individual level, continuous learning could be envisioned as a cycle (see Figure 1). As depicted in this simple cycle, individuals participate in a relevant learning experience such as attending a workshop, receiving advice from a peer, or participating in a task force. The learning experience helps develop new competencies that can be applied on the job.

Figure 1: Continuous Learning Cycle (Tannenbaum, 1997)



Individuals who apply new ideas and skills are recognized and rewarded for doing so. This positive chain of events -- learning, application, and recognition -- can increase people's self-efficacy or their belief that they are able to learn new skills and