

THE EFFECTS OF TEAMWORK
ON INDIVIDUAL LEARNING: A STUDY OF
EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE INLAND REVENUE BOARD
OF MALAYSIA IN SABAH

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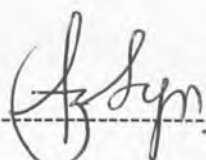
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ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara kerja berpasukan dan pembelajaran individu. Ia juga bertujuan untuk menyiasat tahap kedudukan jawatan seseorang individu terhadap hubungan antara kerja berpasukan dan proses pembelajaran individu. Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk memahami pengaruh kerja berpasukan ke arah pembelajaran individu di kalangan pegawai-pegawai Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri Malaysia (LHDNM). Selain itu, ia juga adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana ia memberi kesan terhadap proses pembelajaran seseorang individu melalui interaksi dengan ahli pasukan yang menyumbang kepada keberkesanan dan kecekapan individu dalam usaha untuk membantu organisasi memaksimumkan tenaga kerja? Sasaran responden untuk kajian ini adalah pegawai-pegawai penaksiran dari Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri Malaysia di Sabah yang terdiri daripada Pegawai Eksekutif Gred 41 dan Penolong Pegawai Eksekutif Gred 31. Responden dikehendaki melengkapkan borang kaji selidik sebagai instrumen untuk pengumpulan data. Borang kaji selidik ini mengandungi dua item demografi dan 37 soalan untuk bahagian B dan C menggunakan 5- skala likert untuk mendapat tindak balas daripada kalangan para responden. Hasil kutipan dan analisa data kajian menunjukkan bahawa dimensi untuk "Kerja Berpasukan" seperti "Proses Norming" dan "Proses Storming" yang dipetik dari Model Pembangunan Pasukan oleh Bruce Tuckman dan "Fungsi Rakan Sepasukan" mempunyai pengaruh yang besar ke atas pembelajaran individu. Sementara itu, "Forming Proses" yang dipetik dari Model Pembangunan Pasukan yang sama dan "Peranan Ahli Pasukan" tidak mempunyai pengaruh yang besar ke atas pembelajaran individu. Dari penemuan kajian ini, pengkaji mendapati bahawa "Tahap Kedudukan Jawatan" seseorang individu tidak akan mempengaruhi hubungan di antara "Kerja Berpasukan" dan "Pembelajaran individu".

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF TEAMWORK ON INDIVIDUAL LEARNING: A STUDY OF EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE INLAND REVENUE BOARD OF MALAYSIA IN SABAH

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between teamwork and individual learning and to investigate the job position level as the moderating effect in the relationship between teamwork and individual learning. This study is taken to further understand the influence of teamwork towards the individual learning among the IRBM's officers and also to find out how does it affect the process of learning by interacting with team members that contributes to an individual effectiveness and competencies in order to help the organization maximize the talents of its workforce? The target population of interest for this study is the assessment officers from Inland Revenue Board Of Malaysia in Sabah which consists of Executive Officers Grade 41 and Assistant Executive officers Grade 31. Respondents are required to fill up the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire is included two demographic items and 37 questions for section B and C by using the 5-likert scale to capture the response from the sampling unit. The findings of the study indicated teamwork dimensions such as "Norming Process" and "Storming Process" of Team Development Model by Bruce Tuckman and "Team Functions" have significant influence on individual learning. Meanwhile, "Forming Process" of the same Model and "Team Roles" does not have significant influence on individual learning. From the findings, the study also found that "Job Position Level" would not moderate the relationship between "Teamwork and Individual Learning".



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRBM) which was previously known as The Department of Inland Revenue Malaysia is one of the government main revenue collecting agencies in Malaysia. It was established on March 1, 1996 in accordance to the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia Act 1995 to give it more autonomy in financial, personnel management as well as to improve the quality and effectiveness of tax administration.

The Self-Assessment System (SAS) was implemented for companies and individuals/business in 2001 and 2004 respectively. The SAS is a system whereby tax payers are required to compute their own taxes and pay the right amount of it. Under the SAS, tax audit would be the core activity in IRBM in order to ensure and encourage voluntary compliance with the tax laws and regulations among the tax payers. There are two types of audit namely, *desk audit* and *field audit*.

Desk audit is carried out at the IRBM's office and mostly concerned with straightforward cases which can be handled through correspondence. Generally, it involves tasks as examining the tax payers' income and expenses records together with various claims declared by tax payer in his income tax return form. Field audit on the other hand, conducted at tax payers' premise and it involves the examination on more complicated issues such as tax payers' business records and financial affairs. In IRBM, audit officers consist of Executive Officers (EO) ranged from Grade 41 to Grade



58 and Assistant Executive Officers (AEO) ranged from Grade 31 to Grade 32. The study will be conducted among the assessment officers mainly because they are more concerned with the routine tax calculation and collection compare to others. The Executive Officers (Assessment) for instance, deals with more complex tax cases which involve tax affairs of higher income groups and provide technical support to Assistant Executive Officers (Assessment. Beside Tax audits, there are other activities carried out in IRBM such as Tax Collection, Monthly Tax Deduction and Real Property Gains Tax. These activities are equally important as tax audits.

In order to reinforce the knowledge of it's newly recruits officers, the IRBM has provided a basic training which covers topics on fundamental tax issues. Despite attended such training, difficulties in understanding and adapting the knowledge and skills taught are still occurred and faced by some of the officers. Teare (2011) explained that training does not always foster and transfer learning as it is normally instructor-led or facilitated and characterized by a pre-determined structure, content and context. This problem occurred in IRBM especially when its officers encountered more complex tax cases such as technical issues that require broad understanding, knowledge and experience in taxation. Sometimes, officers are unable to cope with such difficulties as mostly tax issues are different from one case to another depending on tax payers' type of income, businesses, and industry involved.

Basically, employees in IRBM are evaluated individually each year based on their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Each officer will be given a certain target which they have to achieve in a particular year. That target could be a number of tax cases or a certain amount of tax payment that respectively need to be completed and collected in a year. Generally, each officer is allocated a certain set of tax payers on the basis of the tax payers' tax reference number. One officer would take the odd numbers while the other will in charge for the even numbers. The officer will in charge

for all aspects of work pertaining with the assigned tax payers. The failure in achieving their annual target within a stipulated time might due to many factors. Based on the short interviews conducted among the officers, they mentioned that some of the factors are such as lack of knowledge, experience, skills and educational background among employees.

Failure to achieve a given target will eventually influence their performance evaluation as it will contribute to a lower weighted score performance than those who reach their annual target. Although this problem might not be seen as significant when compared to IRBM outstanding achievements as a whole, it is still the sum of individuals who are part of it that matters. Thus, if this trend is allowed without special attention, this problem can affect the overall performance of IRBM in long term.

1.2 Problem Statement

Previously, the post of both Executive Officer (Assessments) and The Assistant Executive Officer (Assessment) in the IRBM was only open to candidates with qualifications in accounting. Since the tax is related to the accounting profession, the candidates with accounting background were previously seen as the most suitable candidate for the position.

However, at present, the position is not solely held by accounting graduates but also by individuals who have academic qualifications in other areas such as IT, Management, Finance and Marketing. This situation certainly provides opportunities for qualified individuals from other fields to pursue their career in taxation. However, the lack of knowledge and experience in accounting and taxation among these individuals, (especially for newly recruits), will lead to difficulties in understanding and

mastering the tax issues especially without the training and support from colleagues who are more knowledgeable, skillful and experienced in tax assessment.

In line with the IRBM corporate culture that is *to Serve The Best* for the board's client and the increasing pressure to perform effectively, this study is taken to further understand to what extent teamwork contributes to individual learning among the IRBM's officers? How precisely does it affect the process of learning by interacting with team members that contributes to an individual effectiveness and competencies in order to help the organization maximize the talents of its workforce?

Thus, with questions such as these, the study is to investigate the relationship that teamwork has on individual learning and to examine whether the demographic factor such as job position level would moderate the relationship.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to investigate of the followings:

1. To investigate the influence of teamwork (team development process) on individual learning.
2. To investigate the influence of teamwork (team structure) on individual learning.
3. To understand the role of job position level as moderator in the relationship between teamwork and individual learning.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Findings of this study will broaden the knowledge of individual learning especially in providing new evidence about how employees exercise teamwork to improve their learning at workplace. The study will also create awareness among the IRBM employees on the needs for continuously acquiring knowledge and skills for their future career development. In addition, the findings will be useful to IRBM in understanding the importance of individual learning among its employees and to encourage the use of teamwork in the organization.

1.5 The Scope of the Study

This study is to examine the extent to which teamwork can have an impact on the process of acquiring data knowledge and skills among the employees within the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia in Sabah. Quantitative Survey data had been collected by using questionnaire which was given to the EO Grade 41 and AEO Grade 31 within the board. The survey data were distributed to respondents within the IRBM four (4) main branches in Sabah i.e. Sandakan, Kota Kinabalu, Keningau and Tawau.

This survey was sent out through organization contact email as invitation to all EO and AEO to participate in the study. Respondents were notified that all information they provided are confidential and anonymous and the researcher is the only person who would be able to access the data. Follow-up email had been sent out as reminders, in an attempt to increase the response rate.

1.6 Definition Of Terms

This section explains briefly on the terms used in this study. For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of key terms were assumed.

1.6.1 Teamwork

Ingram and Desombre (1999) defined Teamwork as a collaborative and shared activity that is directed towards a common goal. Ingram and Desombre further explained that teamworking is characterized by people working together in harmony for the benefits of the organizations. While Brown (2009) viewed teamwork as a set of interrelated thoughts, actions and feelings of each member that are needed for the individual members to function as a team.

1.6.2 Individual Learning

Individual learning is defined in William and Castro (2010) as knowledge acquisition, skills or competencies that contribute to individual development. It is basically a process of identifying, acquiring and adapting knowledge and skills which can be achieved through study, practice, training, observation and experience.

1.7 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the Introduction part which basically explains about the background of the study which contains about the overview, the problem statement, the objectives, the significance and the scope of the study. Chapter 2 is the Literature review which provides relevant sources related to this study. Followed by Chapter 3, discusses about the Research Design and Methodology used and the rationale behind the choice. Chapter 4 reveals the results and analysis of the collected data. Finally, in Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results, conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to further define the problem and to provide empirical and theoretical framework for the study. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), this chapter is essential as it will help to convince the reader on the researcher's knowledge about the problem area and that the researcher has done the preliminary homework that is necessary to conduct the study.

2.2 Individual Learning

Learning is essential for individual growth. In fact, everyday is a learning process for each and every one of us. Modern learning theories from any cognitive-constructivist paradigm assume that learning involves iterative processes of structuring, refining and restructuring of mental models (Yadin and Or-Bach, 2010). Individual Learning is basically a process of identifying, acquiring and adapting knowledge and skills which can be achieved through study, practice, training, observation and experience.

Collin (2008) defined individual learning processes at work as constituted from former work experiences, individual aims and motives for work and life history at work. According to Noe (2000), learning is a relatively permanent change in human capabilities that is not a result of growth processes. These capabilities are related to specific learning outcome such as verbal information, intellectual skills, motor skills and attitudes (Noe, 2000). While in Lehesvirta (2004), learning is defined as a



knowledge creation process in which information perception and interpretation lead to change in the range of an entity's potential behaviors.

In response to a complex environment and rapid changes in today's global market, Yeh, Smith, Jennings, Castro (2006) recommended that organizations must speed up their learning processes and adapting faster to the world around them. Yeh *et. al.* (2006) suggested that teams need to learn how to develop knowledge, share information and build on each other's knowledge to create new knowledge and new models rather than simply adapt the models already existing.

Consequently, by using a 3-Dimensional teamwork model, Yeh *et. al.* (2006) suggested organizations to continually do the evaluation on the development and processes of teams. Studies had also been conducted to explore on workplace learning and its implications on individuals and organizational developments. It is said that organizations tend to encourage an active learning culture at workplace mostly because of the needs on maintaining and improving their current performance for their future undertakings.

Teare (2011) on his review on workplace learning and its role in developing professionalism, skills, competency and implications for training, concluded that a carefully crafted strategy for workplace learning will yield significant individual and organizational benefits. Teare on his paper pointed out that the organization itself is the best place for learning to occur as people in an organization engaged and learn more readily with their peers and learn from the issues that they confront each day at work. Workplace learning is a subset of life learning as it is the change that people undergo as they perform their work or as they reflect on their work experience (Junaidah Hashim, 2007). Workplace learning is described as a learning that takes

place at work which refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and feeling which results in improved individual or collective adaptation to change in the workplace (as cited in Junaidah Hashim, 2007).

Based on her study on competencies acquisition through self-directed learning among Malaysian managers, Junaidah Hashim (2007) found that the workplace has contributed as effective learning environment whereas most managers learn through their job training. The researcher has recommended enhancing the curriculum by developing learning programs that are relevant to the organization policy requirement and to the employees' learning styles.

Learning can be used as an important tool for an organization to improve its operations and services. Thus, the managers of the organization should encourage their workers to continuously seek for new knowledge and skills by providing them with a working environment that promotes and rewards learning. Reagans, Argote and Brooks (2005) have identified three factors that affect the rate at which organizations learn which are the proficiency of individual workers, the ability of the organization member to leverage knowledge accumulated by others and the capacity for coordinated activity inside the organization.

Each factor varies with a particular kind of experience consists of individual experience, organizational experience and experience working together. The cumulative individual experience provides an individual with an opportunity to become more proficient at performing their daily routine (Reagans *et. al.* 2005).

In addition, Reagans *et. al.* (2005) also explained that the cumulative of the organizational experience would provide the organization with an opportunity to identify more productive routines and practices. Meanwhile, experience working together encouraged individuals to share their knowledge to increase their ability to coordinate across their specialized roles (Reagans e.t al., 2005).

Collin (2008) on the other hand, has done a research about work – related identity in individual and social learning at work. His study was done to investigate how worker’s work – related identity is related to various forms of workplace learning (Collin, 2008). Work – related identity is the intermediate processes which linking individual and social processes of learning in the workplace (Collin, 2008).

Thus, the study has suggested that a person’s work and professional identification and learning should be seen as linked whereas both organizational context and individual’s positions in an organization together with the personal aims and experience have formed the basis for the individual’s identity construction and learning processes (Collin, 2008). Furthermore, from the research, it is also concluded that when the situation in an organization changes radically, the individual learning challenges and needs also change (Collin, 2008).

Renkema (2006) has conducted a research to examine the effectiveness of Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) strategy for life long learning. The study findings revealed that the ILA seems to have had a positive influence on the training attitude of Technical Installation (TI) workers (Renkema, 2006). According to Yadin and Or-Bach (2010), despite of the benefits of team or collaborative learning, there are still problems exist in such learning environment such as the existence of “*free riders*”. Free riders described by the researcher as those students who enjoy the benefits of

collaborative work, but don't contribute to the common goal. Yadin and Or-Bach's (2010) study on the importance of emphasizing individual learning in the collaborative era is conducted to examine the contribution of individual assignments to learning. The research on learning in the last few decades has emphasized the importance of collaborative learning in the learning process.

Under the collaborative learning, students are expected to exhibit a high degree of involvement among team members. Thus, Yadin and Or-Bach (2010) conducted a study to enhance the individual capabilities through individual assignments as these individual capabilities would help the individual in their future collaborative learning or work that they will encounter. The study revealed the encouraging findings such as students expressed higher motivation, independence and confidence in their ability to cope with new and difficult topics related to the course (Yadin and Or-Bach, 2010).

There are several studies on teamwork which have been conducted to investigate whether teamwork can support and motivate individual learning. Stelzer and Reilly (2010) have conducted a study about using teams to improve students performance and to discover whether teams can be harnessed to motivate individual students to improve their performance as well as to increase their learning. The students were evaluated based on their quiz scores. The study has proven that teams did far better than individuals in the task of taking the quizzes (Stelzer and Reilly, 2010). The researcher was also said that the worst individual performers were advantaged by working in teams.

2.3 Teamwork

A team is formed of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (Bateman and Snell, 1999). In addition, Ivancevich, Konopaske and Matteson (2008) defined team as a mature group comprising people with interdependence, motivation and a shared commitment to accomplish agreed upon goals. The existence of a team in an organization has become an important point in achieving a goal for the success of the organization.

Ivancevich *et. al.* (2008) pointed out that the use of teams has increased so significantly in U.S. Organizations due to its perceived benefits derived from using teams including potential quality improvement and enhanced productivity gains from bringing together individuals with complementary skills. According to Brown (2009), teamwork is usually viewed as a set of interrelated thoughts, actions and feelings of each member that are needed for the individual members to function as a team.

Reviews of research on attitude toward teamwork mentioned that organizations' experiences from using team approach to improve performance have pointed to teamwork as an important tool in organizational success (Ulloa and Adams, 2004). Meanwhile, Dayan and Benedetto (2009) suggested that teamwork is considered as a crucial success factors for organizations involved in new product development especially when operating within a highly competitive environment.

2.3.1 Team Development Process

There are numerous theories that have been developed to broaden the body of knowledge of teamwork. One that has been widely cited was the Tuckman's Model of

Team Development. Previous research by Riebe, Roepen, Santarelli and Marchioro (2010) has indicated that teaching of explicit team skills can be aligned with the Tuckman's model to ensure timely delivery of theory and skills. Bruce Tuckman's contribution to teamwork theory helps teams to perform effectively by understanding the life cycle of a team. Tuckman recognized four stages in team development which he labelled as *forming, storming, norming and performing*. The *Forming* stage is a time to get to know and develop opinions about each other (Riebe *et. al.* 2010). This stage of development is characterized by uncertainty about the purpose, the structure and there is no clear process followed by team members. At this stage, team roles have also not been identified and most team members will usually looking for team leader's direction.

The *Storming* stage tends to be marked with conflict and confrontation (Ivancevich *et al.* 2008). Under this stage, team members become more vocal that they might question the goals, the task and interpersonal relationships (Riebe *et. al.* 2010). This stage is essential part for teambuilding in the workplace and it can involve redefinition of the team's task and overall goals. As for the *Norming* stage, relationships are established and team skills are developed (Riebe *et. al.* 2010). It means, at this stage, the roles for each team members have been identified and they begin to perform their tasks that suit their knowledge, skills and experience. Ivancevich *et. al.* (2008) emphasized that under this stage of team development, there tends to be an open exchange of information, acceptance of differences of opinion and active action to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals and objectives.

Research was conducted to examine the effectiveness of teamworking in the Inland Revenue in United Kingdom. The research was done by Procter and Currie (2002). As team members under the norming stage tend to exchange informations and opinions, they would link to a willingness to enter into decisions about the

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