

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, CHANGE READINESS AND WORK PERFORMANCE OF YOUNG MANAGERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to test the mediating effect of change readiness on the relationship between management development programs and the work performance. Four development programs were examined namely on-the-job programs, off-the-job programs, assessment and mentoring. The respondents were all below 45 years old and they are either performing professional occupations or in low to middle level positions. All of them had participated in development programs. Three hundred and ninety-nine employees participated in the study. The results showed that change readiness was the sole significant predictor for work performance and it served as a partial mediator between management development programs and work performance. The findings provides support to the adult learning theory and offers clearer perspective in the area of talent management specifically in succession planning. The study suffers from two limitations; the data analysis was based on self-reported views by the employees and the low R² values yielded in the regression analysis which was only 32.4 percent.

Keywords: change readiness, Malaysia, management development programs, work performance

INTRODUCTION

According to Noe (2008), management development programs (MDP) is the systematic activities planned by the organization for their employees which results in improving and refining their level of skill, knowledge and competency that are necessary to perform work effectively in order to develop themselves into a better employee, and at the same time a better person in the long run. Organization needs systematic and continuous training and development programs in order to enhance the quality of the current employees. These employees' performance as well as productivity in the workplace can be increased if they are provided with a

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comprehensive training and development programs (Singh and Mohanty, 2012). This view is supported by Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) who posited that in any organization, company or firm, providing the workers with the necessary training and management development programs is actually one of the most effective ways to make employees able to unleash their talents and potential.

Similarly, according to Sultana et al. (2012), equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge during training and development programs will also help to improve their performance in doing and completing their job. This consequently leads to putting the organization at one of the best positions in the industry because of their high potential employees. There are four main ways of management development programs that are about to be discussed which are off-the-job programs, on-the-job programs, assessment programs and mentoring. Huge investment is needed and thus, organizing MDPs is expensive and should result the intended outcomes. Given the fact that organizations operate in competitive environment which always require dealing with changes and uncertainties, measuring the outcomes of MDPs is vital.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Organizing MDPs is a common practice in organizations with the objective to prepare younger employees to assume higher positions in the future. Various programs are used and the four common ones are off-the-job programs (OFJT), on-the-job programs (ONJT), mentoring and assessment programs.

OFJT programs in organizations refer to learning environment which takes place outside the workplace which engages variety methods such as instructor-led in classrooms, discussions, simulations, role plays and other instructional activities (Enos et al., 2003). Bassi and Van Buren (1999) noted that such programs are the most widely used for management development. This could be due to the nature of the programs which allow a large number of people to participate at one time and being led by a few experts who serve as instructors. According to Noe (2008), it is common to employers to arrange training programs like workshops, seminars and courses which are designed to teach employees with specific skills or knowledge. This is the beauty of OFJT because they can be planned, designed and the expected learning outcomes could also be determined. Another benefit of the program is the participants, who are mainly managers and high potential employees, have the opportunity to meet with people outside their boundaries and areas; and learn fundamental management concepts and skills. This is especially true for those who do not have basic education in management such as those in hard science like engineers and architects.

Nevertheless, many cited that OFJT as less effective in developing managers. For instance, Fisher (2007) reported that MBA program, which are regarded as among the most popular programs for management practitioners, failed to inculcate the management skills and competences simply because in the program, too much emphasis is put on the scientific theories and concepts instead of the practical sides of management. OFJT is also costly (Frost and Wallingford, 2013).

Another type of management development programs which is widely used is on-the-job (ONJT) development programs. Noe (2008) referred ONJT as hands-on programs which provide the employees with real life work challenges through job enrichment, rotation and assignment on

various work functions. ONJT is the most common program that is conducted in developing the skills of management employees because what is practiced by the learning managers is real (Bohlander and Snell, 2010; Cohn, 2007; Sisson, 2001). In a research done by Jacobs and Bu-Rahmah (2012), they found that the ONJT in the workplace has been expanded greatly. In addition to that, they also mentioned that the development programs actually provide benefits by allowing greater degree of predictability in the training outcomes. On the other hand, van der Klink and Streumer (2002) had the opposite view. Based on their research, it was found that ONJT was actually only partially successful in achieving the learning outcomes. This could be due to the improper design of the program and poor implementation. According to Bohlander and Snell (2010), despite the popularity of ONJT, normally the programs are implemented poorly due to lack of program structure that fails to determine the expected competences to be acquired and the less skilled senior staff in providing the feedback to the learning managers. Others postulated that if the new job assignments are routine, less challenging and not so different from what the employees have been performing, the employees are less motivated to explore new ways of doing things. They might not be able realize that they could do more than just ordinary tasks (McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002; McCall et al., 1988).

Besides OFJT and ONJT, conducting assessment programs is also one of the components in management development programs. It is important to note that assessment programs are not like other training or development programs which aim to equip the employees with skills and knowledge. Assessment program is to gauge and identify the potential, talents and career interest in the employees (Noe, 2008). According to him, the common assessment programs are like performance appraisals, personality tests, psychological tests and assessment centers. Assessment programs are very useful in management development programs because it serves as the avenue for the employees to learn about their strengths, weaknesses and potential in their career. Based on their study, DeRue and Wellman (2009) reported that managers who receive more feedbacks on their performance tend to learn more about their management competences. The finding is in line with others (for e.g. Halpern, 2004; Morrison and Brantner, 1992) who concurred that in the effort to develop effective managers, assessment on performance is pertinent because employees have the opportunity to know how well they perform and how good their skills are at work. Nonetheless, there have been studies which reported low use of well-designed assessment programs. Edwards (2012) indicated that in their survey among HR practitioners, only 8 percent of the respondents reported using systematic assessment programs because of the high cost in conducting the programs which consume time, money and effort. To identify employees' skills and potential, various methods have to be employed but the most used is performance appraisal especially by the superiors.

Another type of management development programs which is widely used is mentoring. According to Cunningham and Eberle (1993), a mentor is a very experienced person who acts as the role model to employees who are less experienced and the mentor serves as someone who gives guidance, advices and will be the point of reference. Jossi (1997) and Kochan (2002) posited that mentoring programs that are built with strong and caring relationships have been proven to increase personnel retention and most importantly accelerate the development of leadership. Scholars postulated that potential managers who work under the guidance of experienced personnel tend to emulate their managerial behavior and attitude (Bandura, 1977; Decker and Nathan, 1985; Steelman and Wolfeld, 2018). This is so because the young managers who are working closely with the mentors get to observe the behavior of their mentors and

eventually adopt the same attitude. At this juncture, the quality of mentoring is pertinent. Catalyst (1993) put forward several key characteristics of mentoring programs which include linking the program with the business strategy, getting full support from the management and designing the program systematically. Mentors should be aware of their roles and must be willing to give feedbacks. According to Marsh (1992), if mentors are less willing to be open with the mentees in providing constructive comments, the mentoring quality will be less effective.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND CHANGE READINESS

As expounded earlier, management development programs are implemented to tap management talents and potential. Given the huge investment in management development programs, it is important to note that the objectives of the programs are actually two-pronged. First is to improve employees' skills with the aim to improve work performance. But that is not the only thing that matter. Nowadays, given the complex environment with rapid changes in markets and technologies, managers not only have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to perform their work, but they must also have the willingness and readiness to adapt with changes. They should always be prepared for a new and different work environment.

Based on their research on 265 chief executives, Hutchison and Boxall (2014) reported that there is some fundamental management skills that all managers need to cope with the rapid changes in the world nowadays. They include the ability to manage uncertainty and renewal, the ability to manage stakeholders and business partners; and the ability to manage limited resources.

In a recent study by Kraft, Sparr and Peus (2018), when the organizations are experiencing changes, the employees expected the leaders to respond to their anxiety. The leaders are expected to give assurance about the positive things that come with the changes despite the ambiguities. Here comes the important attribute in every manager and leader to embrace changes. Managers who are willing to learn tend to perceive uncertainties and changes as challenges and thus will put more effort in meeting the job requirements (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005; Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Legget, 1988). Further, McCall, Lombardo and Morrison (1988) postulated that employees who participate in management development programs are tested their ability to think and behave in conditions which are new and ambiguous. Whether they succeed or fail, the most important goal is the employees get to learn new things. At this juncture, it is pertinent to design management development programs which are able to achieve at least two objectives; first is to produce managers who are receptive to changes and willing to take up new challenges and second is to equip the managers with the required competencies in fulfilling work goals. As posited by many scholars (for e.g. McCall, Lombardo and Morrison, 1988; Brutus, Ruderman, Ohlott and McCauley, 2000), managers and employees need to be given the opportunity to undergo diverse experiences in the workplace because from those that their motivation and readiness to change will eventually be developed.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND WORK PERFORMANCE

Given dynamic business environment, emergence of new markets and stiff competition among employers, the need to have high performing managers who can become the successors for the management team is pertinent. Most organizations prefer to have their own internal successors to assume top management functions and thus they are willing to invest in the

development programs. At this point, it is worth noting the importance of coming up with management development programs to develop the potential so that the employees are able to unleash their talents. Nonetheless, it is also equally pertinent to ascertain the outcomes of the development programs on their job performance. If there is no relationship between the development programs and work performance, the huge investment in development programs will be meaningless.

According to Armstrong and Baron (2000), employees who get the chance to take part in development program are more likely to perform better. Schmidh, Hunter and Outerbridge (1986) mentioned that on-the-job work experience plays an important role in enhancing performance and employees' productivity. It also noted by Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney (1997) that employees with exceptional performance are well equipped with the high job knowledge and skills. Employees who participate in various development programs are exposed to diverse people of different cultures and they also get to experience new situations which test their current competencies and skills. In turn, given the novel and ambiguous work conditions at hand, they have to increase their skills in dealing with people around them. Consequently, the increased skills and experience obtained from the development programs enable the managers to perform their jobs effectively (Schmidh et al. 1986; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russel and Oh, 2009).

MEDIATING EFFECT OF CHANGE READINESS ON MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PERCEIVED WORK EFFECTIVENESS

Adult learning theory by Knowles (1980) posited that adults who undergo experiences in their live tend to develop the need to learn. The theory assumes that adults have innate instinct to change their behaviors after going through certain experiences which in turn will make them open to changes. The acquired skills and knowledge would act as the reason for them to open up their mind for new experiences. The theory also suggested that adults are inherently goal oriented who will make their effort to change for the better. According to Houle (1996), education is pertinent as the platform for adults to create the sense of learning new things and it is crucial for the educators to employ diverse approaches in teaching and learning in order to optimize the results of the education. In similar vein, management development programs have various approaches which include formal education, on-the-job experience, mentoring and assessment which are used to make the participants pick up new things and thus applying the skills in their daily work.

Based on the assumptions in adult learning theory, management development programs are expected to create the sense of change readiness among the managers who participate in the programs. This is so because through the programs, they are made to work on new job assignments which compel them to pick up new skills and deal with unfamiliar tasks. McCauley (2001) argued that when employees are asked to perform new tasks or work on special projects, they will be motivated to learn because the new tasks require different level of responsibility and new sets of skills.

Having the readiness to embrace new things at work is likely to make the employees more capable in meeting job requirements. As posited by many scholars (for e.g DeShon and Gillespie, 2005; Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Legget, 1988), individuals who have high willingness to learn new things have the tendency to strive and put more effort in order to achieve high job performance. According to McCall, Lombardo and Morrison (1988), employees who participate

in management development programs are tested their ability to think and act; and they have to be ready to carry out new functions which have never been performed before. Consequently, going through these exercises and development programs, the employees will be motivated to learn and improve their competencies which will contribute to good performance (Ohlott, 2004). Therefore, we hypothesize that management development programs would make the participants be more ready for changes and thus, making them more effective in work performance. As expounded earlier, the following hypotheses are forwarded:

Hypothesis 1: Management development programs influence work performance

Hypothesis 2: Change readiness mediates the relationship between management development programs and work performance

The above hypotheses propose the idea that change readiness acts as the mediator between management development programs and work performance. It shows the importance of increasing the willingness to accept changes and learn to adapt to new situations. Regardless of the outcomes in job performance, it is pertinent to examine whether employees who participate in development programs have the tendency to embrace incoming challenges and situations which require them to acquire new skills and knowledge.

RESEARCH SETTING AND PROCEDURES

Data were collected using survey forms that contained items that measured studied variables. Given the objective of the study that sought to examine the relationship between management development programs and the learning readiness and perceived work effectiveness of the program participants, the respondents must meet a number of criteria. The employees must be below 45 years old and are performing professional occupations or they were in middle to higher level positions (lowest position was administrative executive). Such criteria are set because these are the people who have the potential to assume higher positions in the organizations. According to Derr (1987), junior managers and high potential employees are supposed to be ready to climb up the leadership career ladder in organization by the time they reach the age of forty. This is the age when they reach maturity in terms of their work experience. It was also a pertinent condition for the respondents to have the experience of going through certain extent of MDPs regardless of how many organization they have been with.

One thousand survey forms were distributed to employees who meet with the criteria set by the researchers. The data collection was conducted in six states in Malaysia. The potential respondents were approached using many ways like personal visits, email communications and regular mails. As a result, a total of 413 forms were received but quite a number of forms were poorly responded and thus only 399 were used for further analysis.

Based on the data collected, the male employees made up 58 percent of the total respondents and the majority (i.e. 60 percent) was those aged between 31 to 45 years old. The rest were below 30 years of age. In terms of ranks in the organization, 28 percent were those in non-managerial posts (administrative executives), 38 percent in low level managerial post and 20 percent in middle level post. Fourteen percent were professionals (who do not hold any managerial posts).

MEASURES

There were 22 items that measured four approaches in management development programs; “off-the-job development programs”, “on-the-job development programs”, “assessment programs” and “mentoring”. The first three development programs were measured using items which were adopted and adapted from Juhdi et al. (2012) and mentoring was measured using items from Dreher and Ash (1990). All the items were measured on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Items measuring change readiness were adopted from Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) which originally used to measure learning agility which has four agility dimensions which range from people, results, mental and change. Since only sample items were given in the article, and thus for the present study, the items used were tapped and self-developed based on the general idea as expressed by Lombardo and Eichinger (2000). We also introduced new items which reflected the change readiness in terms of the willingness to assume higher responsibilities. These items were introduced because the participants of management development programs are expected to be ready taking up new positions at the higher ranks which have heavier responsibilities. The items were tapped from the works of Ready et al. (2010) and Schumacher (2009) which portrayed the leadership aspiration among those who are identified as high potential employees.

The items to measure work performance were adopted from Williams and Anderson (1991). In their study, all the employees’ work performance was rated by the supervisors. However the present study asked the respondents to use their own perception in determining their ability to achieve the work performance and objectives. Indeed, such approach is susceptible to bias because the employees tend to overrate themselves especially when it comes to evaluating their own performance. Based on the meta-analysis by Harris and Schaubroeck (1988), it was found that there were moderate correlations between self-supervisor ratings on the employees’ performance especially among managerial and professional employees. They posited that it could be due to the egocentric-bias among these employees who tend to perceive themselves as highly performing ones. Nonetheless, it should be noted that managerial and professional employees are normally given clear performance indicators (i.e. KPIs) which can be used to evaluate their performance and thus, despite not getting feedbacks from the superiors, they should be able to ascertain their work performance and effectiveness. Hence, the use of self-rated work performance should not be underestimated. All the items were measured on a 5-point scale, which ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Reliability of Measurement Items

All the items were analyzed using principal component analysis with an orthogonal (varimax) rotation. Two separate factor analyses were run to summarise the items into their respective factors. This is to determine whether the items are tapping into the same construct.

The first run was on MDP items and the second one was on the other items on change readiness and perceived work effectiveness. They were factor analysed together because they were treated as the outcomes of the MDP. The examinations of the correlation matrix indicated that a considerable number of correlations exceeded 0.3 and so the matrix was suitable for

factoring. The Bartlett test of sphericity for both factor analysis were significant and that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.876 (first factor analysis) and 0.888 (second factor analysis) which was far greater than 0.6. Inspections of the anti-image correlation matrix revealed that all the measures of sampling adequacy were well above the acceptable level of 0.5. In selecting items for each scale, two criteria were used. First, items on a single factor with factor loading of .3 or less were dropped (Hair et al, 1998), and second, to improve scale reliability, items with less than 0.3 item-to-total correlations were deleted from the scales (Nunnally, 1978).

Factor analysis on items measuring management development programs produced 5 factors consisting of items for the respective variables which explained 56.8 percent of the total variance. Table 1 show the full result from the factor analysis.

Table 1: Statistics and principal component loadings of MDP dimensions

Factor	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1: Assessment programs		.823
Psychological tests (e.g. personality tests and attitude tests)	.792	
Assessment centers (using a number of exercises such as role plays, business games and leaderless group discussions)	.782	
Performance appraisal by subordinates	.723	
Performance appraisal by peers	.705	
Performance appraisal by customers/clients	.679	
360 degree appraisal	.499	
Factor 2: Mentoring		.748
I have been introduced to people who can increase my contact with important individuals in the organization	.760	
My mentor is willing to listen to my concerns and feelings I have about my job	.718	
I would consult someone who is more experienced when I need advice	.641	
I have been given a mentor to help me develop my managerial skill	.596	
I have been introduced to people at work who are prepared to help me develop my managerial skill	.494	
Factor 3: On-the-job development programs		.708
Assigned to work on special projects	.732	
Switch roles with co-workers	.693	
Asked to research new ways to serve clients/customers	.598	
Opportunity to take temporary roles at another company on full time basis.	.581	
Factor 4: Off-the-job development programs		.740
... attend seminars and conferences	.751	
... participate in management development courses	.722	
... participate in workshops	.525	

Factor 5 was not shown in Table 1 because the items loaded in the factor were cross-loaded and the factor became uninterpretable. Therefore, Factor 5 was dropped from further analysis.

The second factor analysis produced 4 factors consisting of items for the respective variables which explained 47.4 percent of the total variance. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 2: Statistics and principal component loadings of change readiness and work performance

Factor	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1: Change Readiness		.827
I am always engaged in activities that will directly affect my performance evaluation.	.691	
I am able to present ideas and concepts in the language of the target audience.	.671	
I always look for the why and how of events and experiences in order to find meanings.	.647	
I can pick up on things in a hurry.	.646	
I am a curious person.	.621	
I like to find new ways of doing things.	.620	
I am able to build relationships with others.	.551	
I have the flexibility to accept new duties and responsibilities.	.537	
I am willing to accept higher levels of responsibilities.	.521	
I look forward to leadership roles.	.485	
Factor 2: Work Performance		.737
I believe I have the ability to accomplish assigned tasks effectively.	.626	
I fulfill responsibilities specified in my job description.	.600	
I am able to manage and organize my tasks effectively.	.485	
I am able to perform the tasks that are expected of me.	.441	
I always meet my formal requirements of the job.	.429	
I never neglect aspects of the job that are obligated to perform.	.437	
I believe I perform well on the job.	.421	
I know both my weaknesses and strengths.	.478	
I am willing to coach and train other employees.	.443	

Factors 3 and 4 only had 3 items respectively and not interpretable at all. Thus, they were dropped from further analysis.

Demographic Analysis

The data analysis was based on 399 responses generated from the data collection using survey forms. The male employees made up 58 percent of the total respondents and the majority (60 percent) was those aged between 31 to 45 years old. The rest were below 30 years of age. In terms of ranks in the organization, 28 percent were those in junior executives, 38 percent in low level managerial post and 20 percent in middle level post. Fourteen percent were professionals (who do not hold any managerial posts).

Pearson’s Correlations Test

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables. Looking at the mean values of all the management development programs which ranged from 2.9 (assessment programs) and 3.3 (mentoring), they suggested that the respondents were given “moderate” amount of support in building their managerial talents. Assessment programs that were rated below 3 indicated the relatively low implementation by the employers in gauging their skills and performance. The mean value of 3.8 for work performance indicated the respondents as being “modest” in the perception on their ability to meet the job requirement. Similarly, the moderate mean value for change readiness (i.e. 3.6) showed the average tendency for the respondents to accept changes, despite participating in MDP.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables (N=399)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. AP	2.9	.67					
2. Mentoring	3.3	.59	.366**				
3. ONJT	3.1	.69	.495**	.459**			
4. OFJT	3.2	.74	.235**	.403**	.363**		
5. Change readiness	3.6	.46	.035	.358**	.292**	.401**	
6. Work performance	3.8	.42	-.045	.215**	.113*	.155**	.565**

Note: AP: Assessment programs, ONJT: On-the-job development programs, OFJT: off-the-job development programs

***.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**.* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson’s correlation tests indicated that all the four management development programs were significantly related to each other with positive directions. The correlation values were between .235 to .495 showed that the relationships were from weak to moderate level and the p values were all below .01. The test results suggested that when a development program is increasingly used, the other development program will also increase.

The Pearson’s correlation test also showed that assessment program was not significantly correlated to change readiness ($r = .035, p > .01$) and work performance ($r = -.045, p > .01$). On the other hand, change readiness and work performance were significantly correlated with the other three MDPs. Nonetheless, the significant correlations (i.e. the r values) that ranged from .113 to .215 indicated weak-to-moderate relationships between work performance and the three management development programs. The positive significant relationships showed that as employees’ participation in mentoring, on-the-job and off-the-job development programs increase, their work performance tended to increase as well. In similar vein, the significant correlations between change readiness and the three management development programs which ranged from .292 and .401, also showed weak-to-moderate relationships. However, despite the weak correlations, the results suggested that the higher the degree of participations in the

mentoring, on-the-job and off-the-job development programs, the higher the change readiness will be.

Testing the Mediating Effect of Change Readiness on MDP and Work Performance

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), there are basically four conditions to be met in considering the mediating effect of a variable. First, the predictors (MDP) and the dependent variable (work performance) must be correlated; second, the predictors (MDP) must be significantly correlated with the mediator variable (change readiness); third, the mediator variable must be correlated with the dependent variable. Fourth, when all the predictors and the mediator variables are entered into the equation to predict the dependent variable, if the effect size of the predictor variable is reduced to zero after the mediator variable is controlled, then it is considered a complete mediator. However, if the effect size of the predictor variable is reduced but is still different from zero after the inclusion of mediator variable, then it is considered to be partial mediator.

Referring to Table 3, all the first three conditions were met with all the three dimensions of MDP (with exception of assessment) were significantly related to both work performance and change readiness. Work performance and change readiness were also significantly correlated and thus, the regression test on the mediating effect of change readiness can be conducted. Table 4 shows the full results of the regression analysis.

Table 4: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of work performance on MDP and change readiness (N=399)

Model no	Predictor variables entered	p	Standardized coefficient (beta)	R	Adj. R²	F
1	AP	.002	-.179	.274	.066	7.986*
	Mentoring	.000	.212			
	ONJT	.226	.073			
	OFJT	.121	.084			
2	AP	.250	-.057	.576	.324	39.087*
	Mentoring	.132	.076			
	ONJT	.522	-.034			
	OFJT	.079	-1.759			
	Change readiness	.000	12.301			

* *F values are significant at 0.001 level.*

As displayed in Model 1 of Table 4, when all the four MDPs were simultaneously tested as predictors for work performance, only assessment and mentoring were found to be significant predictors ($\beta = -.179$, $p = .002$ and $\beta = .212$, $p = .000$ respectively). All the four variables contributed only 6.6 percent of the variance in work performance.

In Model 2 of Table 4, after the inclusion of the mediator variable (i.e. change readiness), the R^2 increased from 6.6 percent to 32.4 percent and the change in the F-values was significant (from 7.986 to 39.087) at .001 level. It shows that change readiness has given significant contribution in explaining the variance in work performance. In order to determine whether change readiness is a partial or complete mediator, the results in Model 2 of Table 4 indicated that it serves only as a partial mediator between all the MDPs and work performance. Even though all the MDPs have become insignificant predictors of work performance (the MDP p-values > 0.05) after change readiness is added into the equation, the standardized coefficient did not reduce to zero. The overall results showed that change readiness becomes the sole significant predictor for work performance ($\beta = 12.301$, $p = .000$).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The objective of the study is to examine the influence of MDPs on change readiness and work performance of the program participants. The results from Pearson's correlation tests indicated that three out of four MDPs were significantly correlated to change readiness and work performance. Assessment programs were found insignificantly correlated. The overall results from the correlation tests provide support to the previous findings which strongly recommend the use of MDPs in developing managers talents because such programs are able to create the sense of openness to new experiences (McCall, Lombardo and Morrison, 1988; Brutus, Ruderman, Ohlott and McCauley, 2000) and help to increase work performance (Stoner and Freeman, 1992; Armstrong and Baron, 2000; Spreitzer et al., 1997; Schmidh et al., 1986; Dragoni at el., 2009; Ohlott, 2004).

The insignificant relationship between assessment programs and change readiness and work performance need to be given closer investigation. The finding is not in line with others which suggested that employees who received feedbacks and reviews on their performance tend to learn better about themselves (DeRue and Wellman, 2009; Halpern, 2004; Morrison and Brantner, 1992). As posited earlier that assessment programs do not aim to equip employees with skills, but scholars argued that such programs are imperative in providing feedback to the employees (Noe, 2008; Halpern, 2004; Morrison and Brantner, 1992). The possible explanation to the insignificant finding could be due to the less systematic implementation of assessment programs in organizations. As reported by Edwards (2012) from their study that only 8 percent of the studied organizations used well-designed assessment programs, it is plausible to see why such programs fail to achieve the intended outcomes. Also as indicated by another study by Juhdi et al. (2015) that majority employers only used performance appraisal by the superiors as the method to measure performance and employees' potential, it is reasonable to see why the program is less effective. The results of the study indicated that in many organizations, assessment programs are still undermined and underutilized. The only popular ways used only confined to performance appraisals which are unable to tap the hidden talents of employees. Other ways like assessment centers and psychological tests are still not fully employed and thus resulting in less effective use of assessment programs.

The hypothesis which proposed the mediating effect of change readiness on the relationship between MDPs and work performance was supported. Despite the partial mediating

effect of change readiness, there is evidence to support the notion that organizing MDPs is able to create the sense of openness to changes which encourage employees to learn (McCauley, 2001; Houle, 1996) and thus positively contribute to their work performance (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005; Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Legget, 1988). Giving employees the opportunity to participate in various MDPs requires huge investment in terms of financial, time and effort, but given the significant impact on employees' willingness to learn and change for the better, it is worth the investment. Therefore, employers should continue providing such programs even though at their expenses.

A closer look at Model 1 of Table 4 which presented the regression analysis showed that only assessment programs and mentoring served as significant predictors to work performance. Noting the significant impact of assessment programs on work performance when the programs were combined with other MDPs (especially mentoring) signified that the use of assessment programs in combination with other MDPs actually could result in better work outcomes. This is because the earlier finding on its insignificant correlation to work performance and change readiness has raised concern about the role of assessment program in developing managers. It is also important to note that the other two MDPs (on-the-job and off-the-job development programs) were no longer significant predictors to work outcomes. At this juncture, it is pertinent to acknowledge the power of all the four MDPs in development programs because each has its own unique impact on the employees. Therefore, all the four MDPs are important in the process of developing managers.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study have provided stronger support to the adult learning theory which put forward the idea that adults who participate in various activities and diverse experiences tend to be more willing to learn (Knowles, 1980). As indicated in the study findings, when potential managers partake in development programs, they are exposed to environments which are different and novel. Being introduced to new people and getting to perform unfamiliar work assignments, the employees will be motivated to pick up new skills and knowledge. As postulated by McCall et al. (1988) that managers who are required to take up new tasks and work with new people tend to use realize that they have to keep up by using innovative ways at work. As learning managers, having the opportunity to work with senior managers who act as role models and mentors provide the avenue for discovering their hidden talents which are never utilized before. Probably they will experience ups and downs as well as failures and successes but the experiences would serve as the lessons for them to be better.

The study also offers clearer perspective in the area of talent management. Employers use succession planning in their effort to identify young talents who are going to be the future managers in the organizations by conducting MDPs so that the employees are able to climb up the management ladder (Wilkins, Snell and Thomas, 2012; Luenerburger, 2012). This approach is used to ensure the potential managers and leaders have values and capability that are congruent with the organizations' direction. Succession planning is pertinent because the current managers and CEOs are mostly baby-boomers who are going to retire soon (Kyndt et al., 2009). Failing to develop the talents among the younger generations would result in shortage of talents

in the future. Despite the huge investment and the risk of losing the talents to other competitors, employers have to take the chances because not providing the opportunities for the high potential employees to expand their skills and capabilities would result in other consequences such as employee turnover and shortage of talents.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study suffers from two major limitations. First, the data analysis was based on self-reported views by the employees who participated in MDPs. The respondents were asked to give their feedback on MDPs participated, change readiness and the work performance. As posited by Harris and Schaubroeck (1988) that there is a moderate correlation between self-superior ratings on their performance especially among management and professional employees, hence elements of self serving bias might exist. The respondents might overrate their work performance. However, it is also important to note that these group of employees are given clear job expectations in the form of key performance indicators (KPIs) and thus they could ascertain their ability in achieving work outcomes, even without the feedbacks by the superiors. Therefore, in the future research, it is good to conduct the study from the perspective of the supervisors who might have different perceptions and views in the area. Other than the supervisors, top management people's view should also be solicited because they could offer insights in terms of the strategic implementation of management development programs.

Second major limitation is, the low R^2 values yielded in the regression analysis (refer to Table 4). The R^2 value from the regression analysis on work performance was only 32.4 percent and it indicated weak explanatory power of all the four MDPs and change readiness in the variance of work performance. It is important to note that MDPs is just one component of human resource management (HRM). Other HRM components which contribute to work performance are recruitment, selection and compensation which have to be used hand in hand with training and development (Wright, McMahan and MacWilliams, 1994). Therefore, in future research, the other HRM components should be examined as well. If the employers are serious in developing talents in management, the effort should start by recruiting individuals with attitude that is matching with the positions. Then selection should also emphasize on gauging the candidates' potential in assuming higher posts. Examining the wider spectrum of HRM in determining work performance might offer clearer insights in predicting the work outcomes of the employees.

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