

PLANNING A STRUCTURED ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE  
MALAYSIAN WORKPLACE: A CASE STUDY

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The decision to embark on this research study was attributable to my father who was a believer of life-long learning and had dedicated his life as an educator.

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional on-the-job training is the most common training method used by organizations however it suffers from the lack of a system and structure, which renders it inefficient and counter-productive. The purpose of the study was to seek answers to the research questions pertaining to structured on-the-job training in the Malaysian workplace. To achieve this, the research design involved a micro-level qualitative single- case study in a purposefully selected manufacturing company in Johor whose training program was unplanned. The research procedures included a review of specific archival records and documentations using a prescribed checklist to understand the barriers in planning the proposed training program. Further, the proposed structured on-the-job training program based on a revised ADDIE Model comprising of the synthesis of the various training and management concepts was conceptualized with the aid of customized worksheets to address five selected performance problems. The performance problems involved three types of training i.e. technical, managerial, and awareness, which encompass the various job functions and job levels. The respective worksheets/checklists were instrumental in both data collection and analysis and the sources of data for the case study were from literature, archival records and documentations. The results of the case study reaffirmed that structured on the job training could meet the business objectives of an organization by focusing on key performance indicators, which could be established using the Balanced Scorecard system. The benefits of this training mode could be quantified and compared with its associated costs using Swanson and Gradous's model in order to justify its use. Further, structured on-the-job training could be planned not only for technical training but also for managerial and awareness training across all job functions and levels. Certain barriers common to most organizations in planning structured on-the-job training i.e. lack of expertise and training time need to be addressed.

## ABSTRAK

Latihan di tempat kerja yang tradisional merupakan kaedah latihan yang sering digunakan di setiap organisasi tetapi kelemahan dari segi sistem dan struktur mengakibatkan ianya tidak berkesan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mencari jawapan kepada soalan-soalan penyelidikan yang berkaitan dengan latihan struktur di tempat kerja di Malaysia. Bentuk penyelidikan melibatkan kajian satu kes kualitatif di peringkat mikro di sebuah syarikat perkilangan di Johor yang kerap mengendalikan program latihan di tempat kerja tanpa perancangan. Prosedur penyelidikan termasuk semakan arkib rekod-rekod dan dokumentasi yang tertentu untuk memahami halangan-halangan dalam merancang program latihan di tempat kerja. Selain daripada itu, satu program latihan struktur di tempat kerja berdasarkan model ADDIE yang diubahsuai dengan konsep-konsep latihan dan pengurusan telah dicadangkan dengan bantuan lembaran kerja yang sesuai untuk mengatasi lima masalah prestasi pekerja yang melibatkan tiga jenis latihan iaitu teknikal, pengurusan dan kesedaran. Lembaran kerja / senarai semak digunakan dalam pengumpulan dan analisis data yang diperolehi daripada kajian literatur, arkib rekod-rekod dan dokumentasi. Hasil-hasil kajian kes mengesahkan bahawa program latihan struktur di tempat kerja boleh memenuhi objektif-objektif sebuah organisasi dengan menumpukan perhatian kepada penunjuk prestasi utama melalui sistem “Balanced Scorecard”. Manfaat latihan ini boleh ditentukan dengan membandingkan kos-kos yang berkenaan melalui model Swanson dan Gradous untuk justifikasi penggunaan program latihan ini. Latihan struktur di tempat kerja boleh dirancang bukan setakat untuk latihan teknikal malah juga untuk latihan pengurusan dan kesedaran yang meliputi pelbagai fungsi pekerjaan dan tahap pekerja. Halangan-halangan yang biasa dihadapi oleh kebanyakan organisasi dalam merancang latihan struktur di tempat kerja seperti kekurangan kepakaran dan peruntukan masa untuk latihan perlu diatasi.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The chapter covers the background of the study, statement of the problem that highlights the need for the research, research objectives and research questions. It also includes a review of the significance, scope and limitations of the study.

#### **1.2 Background of the Study**

On-the-Job Training is the most common training method used by organizations across all job functions whether at the factory floor, clerical, supervisory or managerial level. However, the majority of these programmes are conducted in an informal manner with very little planning involved. Employees are trained by their supervisors or senior colleagues and the actual program scheduling, delivery and duration are left to the discretion of the trainer (Sisson, 2001). In most cases, although the trainers assigned for the on-the-job training are experienced in the tasks they are not given adequate training to become trainers (Walter, 2002; Jacobs, 2003; Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004). Further, the training content is usually incomplete as a lot of the work procedures are omitted due to short cut used by experienced employees (Jacobs, 2003; Brethower and Smalley, 1998). This unstructured on-the-job training lacks consistency, efficiency, effectiveness

(Sisson, 2001) and results in higher wastages, accidents and quality issues, lower productivity and morale (Walter, 2002).

This study relates to Structured On-the-Job Training, which adopts a systematic approach (Jacobs, 2003) as compared to its traditional on-the-job training counterpart, which is informal and unstructured. Briefly, structured on-the-job training identifies job tasks for training and this involves planning, designing and implementing a systematic programme to impart just-in-time job knowledge, skill and positive behavioral changes to the trainee. The advantages of this training approach over the unplanned on-the-job training (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004) include a reduction in the learning curve for new employees and a reduction in the employee's anxiety level due to the lack of clarity of their employer's expectation.

The study into Structured On-the-Job Training in the Malaysian workplace is timely in view of its important role in meeting the many challenges faced by the country. One such challenge is to produce value-added workers (Star, May 14, 2006) who can contribute to the high-end industries and these workers would need to be equipped with employable and multi-skills (Star, May 1, 2005) so that the workforce can be productive. Due to the graduate unemployment estimated at 60,000 (NST, November 3, 2005), there is a need for graduates to acquire the right skills to enable them to work overseas (NST, February 13, 2006). Another challenge is to prepare older workers for employment (NST, October 16, 2005) as well as reduce our dependence on foreign workers (Star, May 15, 2005). In the light of the challenges due to globalization (Star, May 30, 2005), knowledge economy (Star, July 22, 2005) and AFTA (NST, October 10, 2005), the Malaysian workforce must also be equipped with proper training to enable Malaysian companies to be highly competitive and to seize any outsourcing opportunities (NST, September 3, 2005).

In an article "Create the right kind of human capital" (NST, April 9, 2006) it was pointed out that the success of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) depends a lot on the

human capital. RM 50.6 billion will be spent on education and training in the 9MP compared with RM 43.8 billion in the 8MP. On training, there is a need to continually upgrade the knowledge, skills and productivity of the Malaysian workforce in order to compete with economies like China and India who are still enjoying their low-cost advantages. Further, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak reiterated the importance of developing a “precision culture” where every task is carried-out to meet the highest possible performance standard (Star, April 1, 2006).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Manufacturing firms in Malaysia rely heavily on informal On-the-Job Training (International Labour Organization, 1996-2008) with no clearly defined training objectives, cost-benefit analysis and no evaluation being carried-out to determine the effectiveness of the training program. The training itself is carried-out without a proper plan and the training method depends on the trainer’s work experience (Sisson, 2001). Further, the traditional On-the-Job Training is mostly centered on completing the work on hand and the work process flow (even if incorrectly sequenced) more often than not determines the actual delivery of the training (Sisson,2001). In view of this, there is a need to align the On-the-Job Training objectives to the strategic objectives of the organization using a management tool like Balanced Scorecard (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004), to conduct the appropriate cost-benefit analysis to justify its use (Swanson and Gradous, 1988) and to evaluate the training program for its effectiveness in meeting the company’s objectives using the CIPP Model (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 1985).

Large manufacturing firms in Malaysia with formal training use informal On-the-Job Training (International Labour Organization, 1996-2008) without a common model that can be adopted by trainers due partly to the absence of an agreed operational definition of Structured On-the-Job Training. The existing literature presents the conceptual definition of Structured On-the-Job Training put forward by Carr (1992),

Walter (2002), Jacobs (2003), Rothwell and Kazanas (2004) and others. There is a need to adopt one of these many definitions or a synthesis of the various conceptual definitions to provide an operational or working definition as a basis to develop a Structured On-the-Job Training program. Next, there is also no general consensus on what management and training concepts are to be included in the formulation of the training model. Even if “ADDIE” (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation) systematic training approach is used as a framework (Swanson and Gradous, 1988) for developing the Structured On-the-Job Training program, there are many alternative models of the various training concepts i.e. training needs analysis, instructional strategies and training evaluation which human resource managers have to contend with. The ADDIE framework itself has undergone a lot of revisions from the original Air Force ADDIE Model to well over 100 variations right up to the more holistic Organizational System Functions and Quality Improvement for ADDIE Model (Allen, 2006). Thus depending on which variant of ADDIE model (or an ADDIE alternative) is adopted and the models selected for the major management and training concepts, the end-product model of the Structured On-the-Job Training program will obviously be different. Thus it can be seen that any possible theoretical model of a Structured On-the-Job Training program can be developed depending on the variables selected. Besides, the literature citing the implementation of Structured On-the-Job Training in the respective organizations (Philips and Jacobs, 2002; Sisson, 2001) do not present sufficient operating details using real workplace data to explain the basis of their framework and the types of management and training concepts or models used in the training program. There is therefore a need to come up with an agreed operational definition of Structured On-the-Job Training and a comprehensive working model based on an agreed framework which can be easily applied in the Malaysian workplace.

On-the-Job Training in Malaysia is usually carried-out in the production floor of an organization which focuses on technical skills that have a direct impact on the production output or services. This is supported by the literature review involving case studies of organizations where Structured On-the-Job Training involved mainly technical training (Philips and Jacobs, 2002). As for management training, Mafi (2001)



cited the use of managerial training in Liebert Global Services where field engineers were taught how to interact with customers at the various on-site locations. For awareness training, the City Hospital case study was cited by Philips and Jacobs (2002) where Structured On-the-Job Training was used to inform supervisors of the core values of the organization. According to Mafi (2001), although Structured On-the-Job Training has traditionally focused on technical training there is great potential for using this training mode to address the current shortcoming in management training across all job levels. Mafi (2001) also cited Rachham and Morgan (1977) conclusion where managers who performed in specific situations can retain their managerial skills better than if they learned the skills generally and applied them at a later stage. Based on the literature review on case studies conducted by Paradigm Training Systems Inc. and case studies cited by Philips and Jacobs (2002), Structured On-the-Job Training can be applied across all job functions and levels. In view of these, there is a need to determine whether Structured On-the-Job Training can be planned for all types of training across all job functions and levels in the Malaysian workplace.

It is recognized that problems common to most organizations in Malaysia will be encountered in the process of planning Structured On-the-Job Training. Some of these problems include management spending too much time on sales; lack of management commitment and support; lack of understanding of Structured On-the-Job Training; lack of teamwork; untrained trainers; language problems and resistance to changes (Walter, 2002). Rothwell and Kazanas (2004) outlined a pre-test of 21 questions to determine the extent of improvements required to plan Structured On-the-Job Training in an organization. These questions indirectly highlight the specific problems that organizations may encounter in planning Structured On-the-Job Training at the various stages of the training program. Such problems relate mainly to whether key executives are familiar with training and management concepts and whether adequate resources and funding can be provided to support the training program. Hence using an agreed Structured On-the-Job Training model, there is a need to identify any potential problems relating to planning this program in the Malaysian workplace and to come up with the proposed solutions to overcome these problems early.

## **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

There are three objectives of this research as follows: -

- 1) To understand the characteristics of Structured On-the-Job Training in meeting the business objectives of an organization in Malaysia.
- 2) To assess the extent to which Structured On-the-Job Training can be applied to all types of training across all job functions and job levels.
- 3) To understand the barriers faced in planning Structured On-the-Job Training in the Malaysian workplace in order to seek solutions to overcome them.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

Based on the review of the statement of the problem and research objectives, the research questions have been formulated for this study as follows:

- i. How can a Structured On-the-Job Training program meet the business objectives of an organization in Malaysia?
- ii. How can organizations in Malaysia justify the use of a Structured On-the-Job Training program?
- iii. How can a Structured On-the-Job Training program be planned for all types of training across all job functions and job levels in Malaysia?
- iv. What are the barriers that need to be overcome in planning for a Structured On-the-Job Training program in the Malaysian workplace?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The major benefits derived from the study are as follows: -

- Encapsulate the phenomenal development of structured workplace learning in Malaysia with the government's current emphasis on human capital development.
- Response to a lack of study in Malaysia relating to Structured On-the-Job Training and to encourage further research by academicians and training practitioners.
- Produce a working Structured On-the-Job Training model that Malaysian employers can adopt and possibly improve on.
- Help Malaysian employers and trainers improve the On-the-Job Training process to align it with the company's business objectives and to maximize the transfer of training.

## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The problem-oriented approach to the qualitative case study was adopted whereby the major performance problems in Ace Wizards Sdn.Bhd. during the period August 2004 to January 2006 were identified. Of these, only five performance problems encompassing the various functional areas which include engineering, production, human resources and the three types of training i.e. technical, managerial, awareness (Jacobs, 2003) were selected for the case study in order to provide a good representation of training situations which are not typically conducted through On-the-Job Training. In this micro view case study, the proposed Structured On-the-Job Training program was presented as a solution to address these performance problems. However, the actual implementation of the training program was not carried-out in the company due to the constraints in time and resources to address all the five performance problems. Nevertheless, any actual or anticipated problems encountered in the different stages of the proposed training program were identified and the proposed solutions given in the context of the operating environment in Ace Wizards Sdn. Bhd.

## **1.8 Limitations**

The selected company for the case study could not be regarded as a typical Malaysian company that is currently adopting informal On-the-Job Training due to differences in demographic features which include the industry type, annual sales, number of employees, years established, ownership of company, market segment as outlined in the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers Directory 2006. As such, the findings of the case study cannot be generalized due to these demographic differences coupled with other organizational factors which may vary from one organization to another.

## **1.9 Definition of Term**

The main terminology used in this research is Structured On-the-Job Training which needs to be differentiated from the commonly understood On-the-Job Training term which is used widely by trainers, human resources practitioners and employers. The conceptual definitions of Structured On-the-Job Training are found in the existing literature but an agreed working definition is required for the purpose of the research.

### **1.9.1 Conceptual Definition**

Carr (1992) defined On-the-Job Training as structured “when it’s planned and then delivered in accordance with that plan.” In another simple definition, Rothwell and Kazanas (2004) defined Structured On-the-Job Training as “a planned instruction occurring on the job and during the work, centered around what workers need to know or do to perform competently”.

Jacobs (2003) defined Structured On-the-Job Training as “ The planned process of developing competence on units of work by having an experienced employee train a novice employee at the work setting or a location that closely resembles the work setting.”

Walter (2002) defined Structured On-the-Job Training as “ one-to-one training that occurs at or near the actual work setting and is delivered by a designated trainer who follows specific written guidelines; provides observable and measurable performance objectives and is developed and delivered in an orderly and systematic manner.”

### **1.9.2 Operational Definition**

Based on the synthesis of the various conceptual definitions by Carr (1992), Rothwell and Kazanas (2004), Jacobs (2003) and Walter (2002), Structured On-the-Job Training is defined in this study as a systematic approach to on-the-job training which involves a competent employee being trained as an instructor to provide individualized training to the trainee and the training program follows a well-structured plan to ensure that the trainee receives just-in-time knowledge, skills and positive behavioral changes in order to perform the task competently.

### **1.10 Organization of Thesis**

The thesis has been compiled systematically according to the different chapters:-

- Chapter 1: Background, statement of the problem with the research objectives and research questions for the study. Review of the significance, scope and limitations of the study, conceptual and operational definitions.
- Chapter 2: Overview of the Malaysian workplace, experiential learning which includes coaching, mentoring and classification of training. It also covers the typology, development and previous case studies (outside Malaysia) pertaining to Structured On-the-Job Training. Review of relevant training and management concepts in developing the Conceptual Framework and proposed Structured On-the-Job Training program for the research.
- Chapter 3: Research Methodology which covered the Conceptual Framework, research design & method, sample, research instruments, data collection and analysis of the qualitative case study used by the researcher to answer the research questions. The reliability and validity of data for the case study are also discussed.
- Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion of the case study which involved the existing barriers to planning the Structured On-the-Job Training program and the application of the proposed training program to address the five selected performance problems covering technical, managerial and awareness training. Data are analyzed and interpreted in relations to the research questions.
- Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations based on the major findings of the case study with reference to the research objectives. Also, recommendations for organizations/relevant parties based on findings and future research topics are proposed.