

## **LINE MANAGERS' ROLE IN CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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### **—Abstract —**

This paper contributes to the existing knowledge by relating LM's roles in HR roles and employee's CPD. The study also aims to identify factors that promote LMs' involvement in the HR roles. Based on literature, three significant factors are found to promote LMs' involvement in HR initiatives, which are 'desire', 'self-efficacy' and 'support'. Four key HR roles are relevant, which are; Strategic Partner, Administrative Expert, Employee Champion and Change Agent. Quantitative approach, using questionnaire is adapted to identify factors that promotes LM's role in HR initiatives, LM's HR roles, and its relationship, as well as its relationship with employee's CPD. The research methodology that would be used to study the relationship between the factors and LMs' HR role, as well as LMs' HR role with employee CPD is Pearson Moment's Correlation Coefficient. Therefore, the outcome of this research is the LM's participation in HR role is higher when the promoting factors are higher, and the more the LMs participated in HR roles, the more they participated in employees' CPD.

**Key Words:** *Human Resource, Line Manager, Continuous Professional Development*

**JEL Classification:** O15.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Survey from The World Bank (2011) indicated that 66 percent of Malaysians working abroad have chosen to do so because they are not satisfied of their career prospect in Malaysian companies (The World Bank, 2011). Many scholars have documented the prominent relationship between career development, lifelong learning and CPD (Kroth and Christensen, 2009; Hamimah Adnan *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, LMs have a vital role in implementing HR initiatives, because they are responsible for executing HR practices on the operational work floor (Khurana *et al.*, 2009; Watson *et al.*, 2007). HR activities, including training have always been a part of a LM's job (Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou, 2005). There is the belief that there will be more development for a wide range of people if LMs are involved at HR initiatives, especially learning and development part at work (Gibb, 2003). The author also argued that a greater involvement of LMs as developers is appropriate in both creating and sharing knowledge and creating environments for effective performance. Furthermore, a supervisor's support is necessary in instilling employees' willingness to engage in development activities. Greater LM involvement in learning and development facilitate the positive view of lifelong learning, thus can improve the quality of these activities since LMs are best positioned to understand both the organizational needs as well as individual needs (Gibb, 2003). Model of Characteristics of Strategic HRD (McCracken and Wallace, 2000) suggests that one of the factors that are integral to strategic HRD is LM's commitment and involvement. Most of the discussion regarding CPD has inclined to focus on either the needs of the individual professional or the interests of the professional bodies. There are other stakeholders who could have an interest in the effective management of CPD. It is then the manager's responsibility to ensure that work can be done with the staff and resources available, as much as it is on the need to develop the skills and capabilities of each individual (Cossham and Fields, 2007).

LM is seen as the source of professional knowledge for developmental purposes (Jones and Robinson, 1997). The HR department may still have the authority to approve CPD. However, in most of the cases, the arrangements would have been referred, discussed and agreed between the HR specialists and LMs before remitting it to the HR department. This is because the purpose of CPD is not only confined to individual needs, but also the organizational needs. Therefore, this led

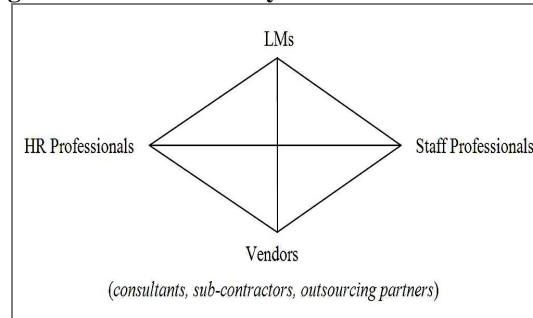
to the three objectives i) to identify which HR roles are LMs involved in; ii) to examine the factors that contributes most to LMs HR roles; iii) to examine the relationship of LMs' HR roles and employee's CPD. Data for this research adopts a collection of primary data by distributing 100 questionnaires to the LMs in a computer equipment provider in a South East Asia company and received a response rate of 87%. Descriptive, correlation and multiple regression analysis was performed to produce the findings of the research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. LM's HR Role and CPD

Dave Ulrich has proposed the four key HR roles that HR champions must fulfil to make a business partnership a reality (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). Ulrich explains that both LMs and HR professionals are HR champions. The author recognizes that HR is no longer the sole responsibility of the HR department, but it involves a firm's broader 'HR community (refer to figure 1).

**Figure-1: HR Community – A Series of Partnership**

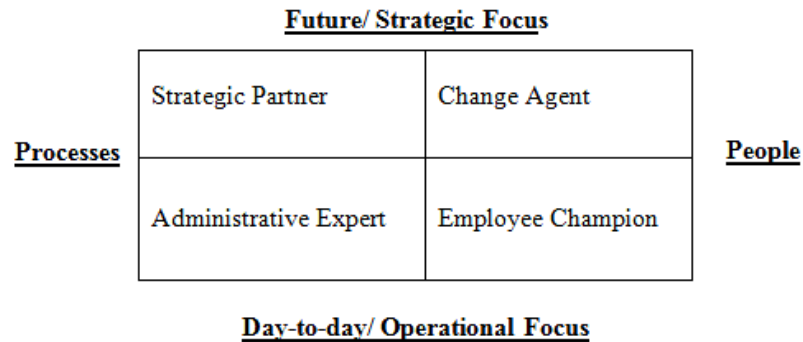


Source: (Ulrich, 1997)

Ulrich explains in 'HR Champions', that the emerging HR community is based in multiple partnerships. LMs bring authority, power and sponsorship. At the same time, they have overall responsibility for the HR community. HR professionals bring HR or subject-matter expertise, organization wide. Meanwhile, staff professionals bring technical expertise respective to their functional areas. Vendors, on the other hand, offer advice or perform routine standardized work. As figure 1 illustrates the four key stakeholders in HR, figure 2 depicts the roles they

are involved in. Ulrich suggests that a HR champion (or HR stakeholder) is involved in four key roles as depicted in figure 2. The two axes represent the HR champion's focus and activities. Focus ranges from long-term/strategic to short term/operational.

**Figure-2: Multiple-Roles Model for HR Management**



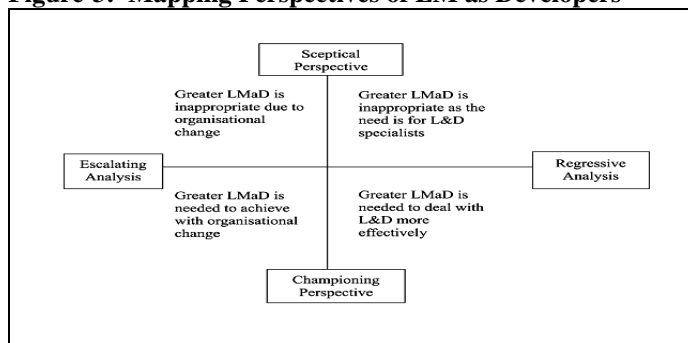
Source: Ulrich (1997)

Hales (2005) has provided some important insights, where the author has discussed regarding the change in the role of first-LMs (Hales, 2005). Hales presents the role of LM, in general term, rather than focusing in HR, specifically. The author explains that most first LMs remain part of a hierarchical structure of direct supervision, individual managerial responsibility and vertical accountability. Their responsibility is usually confined to operations, sometimes extends to resourcing and only to HR matters and they are more likely to be referred on routine operational matters than strategy. Yet they are personally accountable for daily operational volatility and, in some cases, broader performance measurement. This conflicts with the notion of 'partnership', which had been widely discussed since 'Strategic HR' had been termed (McCracken and Wallace, 2000). This partnership by Ulrich (1997) informs that in order to be HR champion, LMs or HR professionals should not be acting in isolation, but rather in mutual respect because LMs are primarily responsible for HR practices in the firm. Of course, the role of LM may be confined to day-to-day operations, but that does not mean that involvement of LM as strategic partner should be belittled. In fact, a LM who is involved in developing strategy would provide better outcomes because they are accountable in aligning the internal culture (Ulrich, 1997).

As a conclusion, it could be said that previous research mostly focused on discussing the involvement of LMs in HR, rather than the role of LMs in the implementation of HR practices. For example, the HR activities are listed, and the LM's involvement in each of the HR activities is investigated. Other than that, previous research also focused on factors that promote or impede LM's involvement in HR. The notion of LM as developers (LMADs) can be associated with LM's role in employee CPD (Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou, 2005). LM's role can be interpreted in few ways (see figure 3). Logically the essential nature of the LM role must increase in importance as organizations continue to experience unrelenting, turbulent change (Renwick and MacNeil, 2002). Therefore, LM as developer role is more important in environment that endures rapid change.

Certainly, the discussion of LM's involvement in the development of employee or CPD; specifically brings upon many appealing views. Many authors explain or rather, gives instruction regarding what the LMs are supposed to do in the deployment or employee CPD. But Gibb (2003)'s views on LMs as developer shed a light in wider outlook on LM's perspective. This creates a unique point for research; to research on the reality of LM's role in employee's CPD.

**Figure-3: Mapping Perspectives of LM as Developers**



Source: Gibb, 2003

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Objective One: To identify which HR Roles are LMs Involved In**

All the four factors' mean values are not high in variance. They range from 3.30, 3.46, 3.71 and 3.80 respectively. As a result, LMs of in the company were involved in all four HR roles moderately. Mode value is measured to assess the range of scale that is chosen by majority of respondents. The mode value for Strategic Partner, Administrative Expert, Employee Champion and Change Agent are 3.00, 3.50, 4.00 and 4.00 respectively. It seems that LMs in the company perceive themselves as more dedicated to Employee Champion and Change Agent role compared the other roles. This can be explained due to the 'people-oriented' nature of LMs. As portrayed in figure 4, Employee Champion and Change Agent are both roles that require dealing with people. The only difference is that Change Agent role focus on future while Employee Champion role is more concerned towards day-to-day basis. This is because of the LMs has prime responsibility in engaging with employee and that HR cannot champion, advocate, represent or even sponsor employees. Thus, championing employee has always been a part of LM's job (Hutchison and Purcell, 2003; Inyang, 2010). Due to the changing nature of manufacturing firm, Change Agent role is important for LMs in the company. Previous authors have agreed that as a change agent, LMs are given the responsibility to instigate those changes amongst employee, especially during organization's transformation (Inyang, 2010; Renwick and MacNeil, 2002; Hutchison and Purcell, 2003). One of the vital notions to note the study did not truly support Hunter and Saunders (2006) explanation about Strategic Partner. LMs and HR department should work in partnership, whereby, LMs have to contribute more in this role than other three. Mutually, the partners expect, and are expected to contribute their skill and knowledge in discussion (Holbeche, 2009). In the company, LMs are less involved in Strategic Partner role compared to the other three. This is proven on the lower value of mean=3.30 and mode=3.00 compared to Administrative Expert, Employee Champion and Change Agent roles. In Malaysian context, the LMs are found to be more accommodating (Asma Abdullah, 1992). Malaysians are generally group-oriented (Asma Abdullah, 1992; Reilly and Williams, 2006). Therefore, the spirit of collectivism is more important than that of individualism, and tend to focus on relationships more than the task with higher need for affiliation and lower need for autonomy. Generally, Malaysian LMs are more inclined to follow order, than taking autonomous decision.

#### **4.2. Objective Two: To examine the factors that contributes most to LMs HR roles.**

From the findings, a number of patterns could be seen. First, it is observed that *desire factor* does not significantly contribute to majority of HR roles (Administrative Expert, Employee Champion and Change Agent). It does, however significantly contribute to Strategic Partner role ( $r=0.310$ ). Next, results show an inverse relationship between *self efficacy factor* with strategic partner (Beta= -0.244), employee champion (Beta= -0.331) and change agent role (Beta= -0.359). Self efficacy does not significantly contribute to Administrative Expert role. Lastly, it seems that *support factor* contributes the most to LMs HR role. This is signified by the Beta value to Strategic Partner (Beta= 0.511), Administrative Expert (Beta= 0.427) and Employee Champion (Beta= 0.289) roles are noticeably higher than other factors. Support factor, however do not significantly contribute to Change Agent role. This study supports the findings of Watson *et al.* (2007) and the factor with the highest mean was in relation to the working relationship with the HR specialists. Therefore, the results clearly support the importance of relationships between HR and LMs (Hutchison and Purcell, 2003; Bos-Nehles, 2010; Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Hunter and Renwick, 2008). Results indicate that desire factor only contributes to strategic partner role. It does not contribute to administrative expert, employee champion and change agent roles. This result may contradict with devolution literature, but it seems to support Bos-Nehles (2010). Self efficacy variable has listed capacity, perceived competencies, past experience and training as items in the questionnaire. Therefore, in context of the company, the LMs find that their capacity, perceived competencies, past experience and training suppress them in performing HR roles. This could be due to their lack of HR theories or misleading experience. Renwick and MacNeil (2002) explained in their article that LMs are internally discouraged from explicitly performing their HR initiatives even though they have high competencies because they are afraid to take accountability (Renwick and MacNeil, 2002).

#### **4.3 Objective Three: To examine the Relationship of LMs' HR Roles and Employee's CPD.**

Administrative Expert role do not have a significant contribution towards employees' CPD. This may be mainly because of the nature of administrative expertise itself. Administrative Expert is more task and process oriented, unlike

Employee Champion and Change Agent roles which are people oriented. The other roles correlate with CPD at strategic partner ( $r=0.372$ ), employee champion ( $r=0.311$ ) and change agent ( $r=0.191$ ). Overall, the LMs are involved moderately in their employees' CPD.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study provides some interesting insights to factors which contribute to the line manager involvement in HR roles, the involvement of line managers in HR roles. It also brings to light the importance of involving line managers in employees CPD although in this study is limited. Perhaps the organization should consider developing further on this context.

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