

Students' Organizational Socialization Experience During Industrial Attachment and its Influence on Their Career Readiness

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Abstract: Industrial attachment (or practical training) has always been an integral part of university academic curriculum. The focus of these practical trainings is mostly directed toward the student trainee's exposures to skills and task proficiency. This study looks at a more inclusive approach to student's industrial attachment by exploring the multi-dimensional aspects of organizational socialization and its relationship to their career readiness level. A survey using dyad unit of analysis was carried out involving 120 final year students and their respective workplace mentor. The multiple regression analysis (SPSS) carried out indicated that only 3 dimensions of organizational socialization (namely, Understanding, Training and Performance Proficiency) were found to have a positive and significant relationship on perceived students' career readiness. The finding could suggest the development of a more structured approach for industrial attachment with the relevant socialization dimensions embedded in its programs. A new approach to evaluating the effectiveness of practical training could also be developed.

Key words: Career readiness • Practical training • Industrial attachment • Dyad

INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability in recent years has become a worldwide issue of concern. According to ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook 2016, Trend for Youth report, the global youth unemployment is set to rise by half a million to reach 71 million in 2016 [1]. Youth unemployment is also typically higher than the overall unemployment rate. Malaysia youth unemployment also showed a slightly increasing trend from 10.2% in 2014 to 10.7% 2015, which involved 273, 500 persons. 60.8% of all unemployed workers in Malaysia are between 15 – 24 age group categories. This ratio of youth unemployment to overall unemployment appears high at 3.3 times [2]. Official data showed that 42.1% of unemployed persons is from the youth age group of 20 – 24 years old, where this cohort is usually well-educated [3, 2]. The Malaysia Department of Statistic also revealed that, in 2014 about 130, 000 persons (31%) of unemployed had a tertiary education [3]. One out of four fresh graduates remained unemployed 6 months after graduation, with the majority being Degree holders [4]. The Arts and Social Sciences graduates have the highest unemployment numbers

(44.5 %). From the total number of unemployed graduates, 70% are from public universities, while 26% are from private institutions [5].

In response to this alarming circumstances, the Malaysian government has implemented several important programs and policy initiatives. Among them are Skim Latihan 1Malaysia (SL1M), Graduate Employability Action Plan (with a budget of RM200 million), Skills Development Fund under the Ministry of Human Resources (RM440 million) and the New Entrepreneurs Foundation (with an initial capital of RM50 million). All of these strategic initiatives points to the importance of giving students hands-on experience. Clearly, internships programs have become the platform for graduates to acquire and demonstrate career-readiness to potential employers. An outcome from a graduate employability survey in 2014, which was conducted by Talen Corp in collaboration with the World Bank, also mention that 90% of companies feel more practical training should be provided for university graduates [2]. The survey covered 200 companies that employ around 245, 000 workers and represent a wide cross-section of National Key Economics Area (NKEAs).

Realizing the importance of this aspect, universities have included practical training (or industrial attachment) for duration of 3 to 8 months, as part of their academic curriculum [6]. Employers agreed that industrial training program is one of the vital contributors to the employability skill [7]. Industrial attachment have provided opportunities for undergraduates to apply what they have learnt in the university and making them more aware of the needs and expectations of industry as well as getting them to be more employment ready [8]. Chillias, Marks and Galloway [9] suggested that, internships can enhance employability and can indeed be a mechanism for accessing permanent jobs. Fen Chen, [10] found that internship experience, alone or together with other work experience, was related to moderately higher levels of career competencies. Intern initiative, mode of learning, relationship with supervisors and monetary compensation also showed positively relation to changes of career competencies. Practical training also provides the opportunity for students to test out the theory and knowledge they have learned in the university thus enriching the academic experience with work-based issues and examples [11]. Basically the main objectives of practical training or industrial attachment is to provide a set of achievements – *skills, understanding and personal attributes* – that make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations [12]. Another important aspect of practical training is that it could improve the soft skills of the students, since they usually need to work in a team, give presentations and make report during the training period it helps to improve their communication skills, management skills, written, oral and presentation skills. It also promotes team spirit in the student and enforces good work ethics [13].

The studies cited above shows the importance of practical training to students' employability potential or career readiness. This study explores further the issue of practical training from the standpoint of the students' *organizational socialization experience* as one of its central component. After reviewing literatures on organizational socialization, specific dimensions have been selected for further study. The main research question that we hope to answer is, does students experiences the organizational socialization process during their practical training and would it contribute positively to their career readiness potential?.

Literature Reviews

Career Readiness: Career readiness refers to the possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and work understanding that will enable graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment [14]. It is the extent to which a person possesses skills and other attributes to find and stay in work and also to be a key goal for individuals to manage their career and for organizations to foster their workforces [15]. Ensuring students' career readiness requires a rigorous blend of academic, technical and employability skills and the ability to apply these skills in authentic environments. Villarreal [16] mentioned thinking skills, personal qualities, resource management, interpersonal skills, information skills, systems management and technology use as crucial for career readiness. Super [17] introduced the Life-Career Rainbow theory, which he believe that career readiness is a continuous lifetime development process that describe the developmental aspects of career development that fits in well with the organizational socialization concept.

Organizational Socialization: Organizational socialization can be defined as the continuous process by which individual acquires the social knowledge and skill necessary to a specific role in an organization [18, 19, 20]. According to Choi [19] newcomer socialization is very important for organization because newcomers who experienced successful socialization process will eventually contribute better to organizational performance. In an attempt to systematize the results yielded by research on organizational socialization, Saks and Ashforth, [21] have proposed a multilevel model resulting from the combination of the theories and dimensions examined in the literature. These dimensions include *power hierarchies, the organization's values and goals, knowledge of tasks, clarity of role, task mastery, social integration and social identification*. Chao *et al.* [18] identify the main content areas that describe the newcomer's social learning process as *organizational politics, performance proficiency, organizational goals and values, technical-professional language used in the organization, organizational history and culture; and relationships with organizational members*. The present study has identified four dimensions of organization socialization as deemed most relevant to students' internship experienced and organizational socialization process.

Performance Proficiency: Performance proficiency is defined as learning the tasks involved on the job that entails features such as understanding task duties, assignments and priorities as well as ways of handling routine problems [22]. Learning the specific tasks and developing skills in their work for newcomers is critical part of the socialization process [23, 18, 22]. A study by Ayarkwa, Adinyira & Osei-Asibey [24] reported that during industrial training, students showed high level of performance achievement in their ability to carry out the instructions, ability to work as a team and able to apply knowledge gained from the university.

People: To develop organizational socialization among newcomers, co-worker support is an essential component. Taormina [23] and Filstad [25] defined co-worker support as an employees' perceived acceptance by colleagues and the extent to which they provide assistance during the day-to-day interactions at work. By facilitating for newcomers getting access to role models and providing newcomers with support from experienced colleagues positively affect organizational commitment. Similar findings also revealed by Taormina [26], with the assistance of helpful co-workers, the process of socialization among newcomers become more easily accomplished.

Training: Training refers to the extent to which the employing organization has helped the employee obtain the functional skills or abilities needed to perform a particular job in the organization [23]. Saks, [27] indicated that the amount of training received by newcomers was positively related to job satisfaction, commitment, ability to cope and job performance. Consistently, the result for the intention to quit the organization shows a negative relation toward the amount of training. According to Collins [28], orientation should be given to interns for explaining the aims and importance of industrial training, related laws, rules/regulations and methods to handle problems. Howard & Natasha, [29] found that employees attending the orientation training were significantly more socialized on 3 of the 6 socialization content dimensions (goals/values, history, & people) than employees who did not attend the training.

Understanding: Taormina, [23] stated that understanding is an assessment of how well the employee comprehends a variety types of information about the organization in

which he or she works and how that organization functions. This would include information about the organization's goals and objectives, how it operates, how to get things done, etc. According to Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks [30], interns should avail themselves of the opportunity to learn about the company and what it is like to work there day to day, in order to fully understand its culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population and Sampling Procedure: This exploratory study was carried out to discover the potential influence of university students' organizational socialization experience on the level of their career readiness. The population of this study is the final semester business undergraduate students that are required to undergo a 4 month practical training (or industrial attachment) as part of their academic graduating requirement. Simple random sampling was carried out using the sampling frame obtained from the Academic Office. The dyad unit of analysis was chosen for this study, where the items for the organizational socialization experience was answered by the students and the level of career readiness was answered by the mentor at their respective workplace. The questionnaires were distributed to the entire population elements (N=120), but probably due to the dyadic nature of the unit of analysis only 86 (72%) completed (pair) of the questionnaires were able to be collected. The respondents are all from *Bumiputra* ethnic background, ranging from 20 – 28 years of age and majoring in HRM, Marketing and International Business. Majority students did their practical training at the private sector, while some are attached with the various government agencies throughout the country. Almost 58% of the respondents are offered a job position at the place where they did their practical training, suggesting a level of management satisfaction of their performance. 26% indicated they would continue their study, while 10% plan to start their own business after they graduated from the university.

Measurements:

- Career Readiness is operationally defined as the respondent's readiness or confidence to face the challenges of real or actual working environment. The 5 items used to measure this variable were adapted from Sageev and Roamowski (2001) and

Meier *et al.* (2000). Examples: *"I feel the student is well prepared to face the actual challenges of working life"* and *"I feel that the student's professional competencies are still far from the standard expected by industry"* (Reverse-coded). All the items were answered by the respective workplace mentor. The reliability test Cronbach's alpha is .826.

- Performance Proficiency refers to the respondents' perception of having acquired the right skill-set to perform the task assigned to them in the organization. There are 4 items used to measure this construct. Examples: *"After going through the practical training, I have learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner"* and *"I can easily understand and learn any task assigned to me"*. The reliability test Cronbach's alpha is .743.
- Social Networking refers to the employees' perceived acceptance by colleagues and the extent to which they were able to provide assistance during the day-to-day interactions at work. There are 4 items used to measure this construct. Examples: *"After going through the practical training, I have managed to successfully establish a good relationship with most employees in this organization"* and *"My relationship with other co-workers in this company are very good"*. The reliability test Cronbach's alpha is .758.
- In-house Training refers to how well the company has prepared the respondents to do a job through various on-the-job and off-the-job training it has conducted. There are 4 items used to measure this construct. Example: *"After going through the practical training, I have been able to better understand the theories I have learned in the university"* and *"Instructions given to me during practical training have been valuable in helping me become a better employee"*. The reliability test Cronbach's alpha is .891.
- Understanding measures how well the employee comprehends how the organization generally functions and how to operate within it. There are 4 items used to measure this construct. Example: *"After going through the practical training, I have a better understanding of goals and objective of this organization"* and *"I am aware of the important issues related to this organization"*. The reliability test Cronbach's alpha is .847.

The measurement items used for the organizational socialization dimensions are adapted from Taormina [23] and Chao *et al.* [18]. All the items were measured using the Likert scale; ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

Goodness of Measures: As reported above the results from Cronbach Alpha test showed a very good reliability scores for all the variables, ranging from 0.80 to 0.89. The construct validity of all the organizational socialization dimensions was determined by Exploratory Factor Analysis, using the Principle Component extraction with Varimax rotation. The analysis results showed a range of loadings between, 0.73 to 0.86. The measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test) is 0.85 and the Bartlett Test of Sphericity is significant. All the items resulted into 4 factors, confirming the distinctiveness and validity of all the Organizational Socialization dimensions used in this study (refer to Table 1).

Descriptive Statistics: Looking at the descriptive statistics, it shows that the mentors at the workplace felt the students are actually moderately prepared for their career (mean=3.54). As for the OS dimensions, respondents agree that they have the acquired enough skill to enable them to effectively carry their responsibility (mean=3.79), while at the same time agreeing that they did managed to have an good relationship with other employees in the organization (mean=4.07). The students also agree the benefits they have obtained from the training they received from the organization (mean=3.81). Finally, the students indicated that they have a moderate understanding of the way the organizations operates and the important issues relevant to it general performance (mean=3.70).

Multiple Regression Analysis: To test the predictive ability of the independent variables, multiple regressions were carried out. All assumptions that are pre-requisite for a multiple-regression analysis, such as multicollinearity, normality, treatment for outliers and others are all taken into account before the test is carried out. Result from in Table 2 shows that the 31% of the independent variables could be assigned for the variations in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .31$, $p < .001$). This result shows that organizational socialization does actually have a significant influence on students' career readiness.

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis on Organizational Socialization Experience

Items for Organizational Socialization Dimensions	Factor loading			
	1	2	3	4
Performance Proficiency				
(1) I have learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner	0.105	0.314	0.541	-0.061
(2) I have become more skilled and able to apply new knowledge when carrying out my duties.	0.037	-0.040	0.586	0.106
(3) I can easily understand and learn any task assigned to me.	0.160	0.033	0.918	-0.013
(4) I was not able to develop any useful work-related skills and ability.	0.155	0.043	0.922	0.024
People				
(1) I have managed to successfully establish a good relationship with most employees in this organization.	0.667	-0.082	0.315	0.161
(2) I was easily accepted as 'one of the gang' in my department where I was attached.	0.845	-0.089	0.161	.133
(3) My relationships with other co-workers in this company are very good.	0.823	0.287	0.049	0.040
(4) I have difficulties to "fit-in" with other employees in this organization.*	0.816	0.116	0.027	-0.031
Training				
(1) After going through the practical training, I have been able to better understand the theories I have learned in the university.	0.022	0.647	-0.050	0.185
(2) The trainings provided by this company have greatly helped me to improve my skill and knowledge.	0.020	0.815	0.059	0.098
(3) Instructions given by my supervisors during practical training have been valuable in helping becoming a better employee.	-0.051	0.701	0.086	0.218
(4) I am satisfied with the training programs that I undergo during my practical training.	0.194	0.691	0.185	-0.142
Understanding				
(1) I have a better understanding of goals and objectives of this organization.	0.156	0.232	0.038	0.886
(2) I have fairly good knowledge of the way this organization generally operates.	-0.065	-0.036	0.010	0.688
(3) I am aware of the important issues related to this organization.	0.161	0.478	-0.145	0.522
(4) I have a better appreciation of the knowledge and skills needed by other employees to perform their task.	0.150	0.167	0.138	0.854
Eigen Value	4.161	2.598	1.830	1.647
Percentage of Variance	26.006	16.239	11.436	10.295
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	0.636			
Bralett's Test of Sphercity (sig.)	0.000			
Extraction method: Principle Components Analysis				

Table 2: Relationship between Organizational Socialization Dimensions and Career Readiness

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable (Career Readiness)	
(Organizational Socialization)	Std. Beta Coefficient	Sig.
Performance Proficiency	0.222*	0.037
People	0.101	0.340
Training	0.276*	0.011
Understanding	0.237*	0.028
R ²	0.310	
F change		

Analyzing the coefficient value of the individual dimension of organizational socialization show that training has the strongest influence (beta .276, $p < .001$) followed by understanding (beta .237, $p < .001$) and performance proficiency (beta .222, $p < .001$). Contrary to what has been predicted, people does not have a significant influence on career readiness Table 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study explores the level of students' career readiness from a potential employer's perspective and

how it could relate to their socialization experience during practical training (industrial attachment). Socialization is usually discussed from the organizational perspectives and how managers could develop suitable tactics to familiarize newcomers and is also considered a long-term and an on-going occupational process. This typical nature of organizational socialization could explain the low-moderate outcome (R^2 : 0.31) of the regression model, as the students only spent limited time and job scope during their practical training. The result also reflects the complexities involved with graduate employability, where other external and internal factors that might have more determinative influence. For future studies we suggest these factors which might include internal (*company hiring philosophy and critical nature of job*) and external (*employment market supply and demand*) be introduced as moderators, with expected positive influence over the relationship between organization socialization and career readiness.

However, the overall result from the multiple regression analysis itself shows that socialization had a positive influence on the managers' opinion on the student's career readiness (F change; 8.060, sig.). The fact

that the dependent variable is measured from the workplace supervisors' perspective could reduce the issues of biasness from self-assessment. The outcome of this study should also ignite interest of the university administrators. As practical training (and industrial attachment) is part of an academic curriculum, university management should develop a socialization approach of this academic process. The program and evaluation system should reflect the elements of organization socialization and students are expected to focus on these elements while undergoing their industrial attachment. Collaborations with the respective business organizations could be initiated for this purpose with benefits for all parties concerned.

Finally, observing the standardize beta coefficient only three dimensions of organization socialization showed significant influence. The strongest influence comes from *training*, followed by *understanding* and *proficiency* respectively. The justifications of these results have been discussed in the literature review. Even though relationship with co-workers (people; 4.07) had the highest mean value, it did not have a significant relationship to career readiness. As such, it is the individual's commitment to work related issues (*training*, *understanding* and *proficiency*) that seems to overshadow the social relationship when a person is being evaluated for a job in the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

To improve graduates employability, universities should have a structured approach by embedding the dimensions of organizational socialization elements to their student's practical training curriculum. Suitable modules could be developed to ensure relevant aspects of organizational socialization be used in the student's evaluation process. Apart from the earlier suggestions, future research could consider investigating a more diversified population, which could involve different ethnic background; comparing between technical (engineering) and non-technical (law, social science) schools.

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