Social Skills and Social Values (SSSV) in the National Dual Training System (NDTS)

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ABSTRACT

Employers are expecting to hire graduates who can function as employees who are equipped with various skills and excel in social skills and social values (SSSV). Industry has high expectations of the ability of graduates, and it is now paramount for graduates not only to be equipped with academic qualification but with SSSV as well to be more marketable in a job market that has become intensely competitive so as to land the most lucrative job industry has to offer. Employers now assume that those who lack SSSV are ill-prepared to enter the job market. The opinion is that training institutions are accountable for producing balanced and multi-talented graduates who are competent in both technical and non-technical skills. In this paper, we have used the focus group (FG) to distinguish the SSSV problems faced by the National Dual Training System (NDTS) apprenticeship based on the perspective of the trainers. This study is an expansion of the existing SSSV outlined in the handbook by the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources. The respondents in this study were NDTS trainers of public and private skills training institutes that offer the NDTS programme. Four FGs were carried out. The data were analysed using the Atlas.ti software based on thematic analysis strategy, and a few themes were identified from the analysis. The majority of the trainers provided positive feedback on the technical skills of the apprentices. In addition, a few other issues were raised by the trainers regarding the SSSV of the NDTS apprentices.

Keywords: Focus group (FG), National Dual Training System (NDTS), social skills and social values (SSSV)

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INTRODUCTION

The changing environment of the modern workplace, rapid high technological development and application in combination with the emergence of a knowledge-based economy (K-economy) to sustain economic growth have demanded a labour workforce equipped with a set of skills that are essential for employability. Nowadays, employers are looking for entry-level workers who have high-level skills, knowledge and personal qualities to complement job-specific skills, develop job scope and transform the organisation (Rosenbaum, 2001; Lankard, 1990). Recent studies conducted in various developing and developed countries found that graduates do not have the required skills for the working environment (Tymon, 2013; Cumming, 2010; Heaton, McCracken, & Harrison, 2008). The studies revealed that employers rated the following as major desirable employee traits: punctuality, awareness of responsibility, cooperation with the supervisor, good attitude towards work, willingness to adapt and learn, ability to coexist with other employees, perfect and fitting appearance, perfect and consistent work attendance, familiarity with fundamental computer skills and learning and good communication skills. In fact, many empirical studies conducted in both industrialised and developing countries on the effectiveness of entry-level staff from the perspective of employers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of readiness of entry-level employees (Zakaria, 1998). Various countries across the world have conducted research and published reports on the need to prepare apprentices or students for the adult workplace of today and the future (Bhaerman & Spill, 1988; Cox & King, 2006).

A knowledgeable, competent and disciplined workforce with a strong sense of creativity is an important element in realising Vision 2020. Based on this scenario, the Department of Skills Development under the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources plays a noteworthy part in supporting the advancement of knowledge workers (K-workers) to build a knowledge-based economy as a strategy for perpetuating rapid growth and continuous competitiveness towards achieving Vision 2020. Among the issues and challenges from the perspective of the Malaysian government is holistic human capital, which includes knowledge, skills and attitude, and a highly skilled workforce to support a K-economy as well as career paths and jobs for local youth (Master Plan for Malaysian Occupational Skills Development and Training, 2008-2020). The main challenge to industry's point of view is incompetence and little emphasis on occupation aptitudes such as cooperation, problem solving, business know-how and the ability to learn how to learn. There are also issues and challenges faced by training providers and apprentices that highlight the shortage of competent trainers and assessors. Thus, there is a requirement to amend the curriculum with a demand-driven approach and the need to create a new learning environment based on self-learning and learning through experience (Master Plan for Malaysian Occupational

Skill Development and Training, 2008-2020). Consequently, the objectives of the Master Plan is to produce K-workers by emphasising social skills and social values (SSSV) through the most recent training methodologies and extensive aptitudes, the National Dual Training System (NDTS).

The NDTS approach has been demonstrated in developed countries such as, for example, Germany to create talented and skilled labourers through collaboration between public training institutes and private industry in apprenticeship training. This training technique permits a persistent supply of talented and skilled labourers to meet industry demand. The most distinguishing feature of NDTS compared to other skill training programmes is the requirement for trainers and coaches to integrate SSSV explicitly in the conduct of teaching and learning technical content. The quality of NDTS lies in the blend of specialised ability and human-based competency (Sail et al., 2007, p. 5).

With reference to a survey on Malaysian students' employability skills, Malaysian employers indicated that while graduates are exceptional in their field of specialisation, they are shockingly lacking in soft skills (Juhdi, Yunus, & Samah, 2006). As indicated by the City ad Guilds Centre for Skills Development Final Report 2008, satisfaction of Malaysian employers with the quality of their employees' training in technical specialisation is higher than the quality of training in generic skills. The report also indicated that Malaysian employers believed that school-leavers with vocational training have preferable job employment opportunities. Nonetheless, they are less satisfied with the inspiration, communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking and entrepreneurial aptitudes of academic graduates. This obviously demonstrates that non-specific aptitudes ought to be embedded in vocational training programmws. In response to these challenges and issues, the strategy for generating skilled trainers has to be comprehensive and integrated.

Statement of the Problem

In the implementation of NDTS programmes, the trainer is a noteworthy player in training either in the work environment or training institutions. At the training institutions, trainers must prepare the technical theory and non-technical subjects. In addition, trainers need to organise apprentices and guarantee that all training exercises meet the academic module prerequisites.

The government has introduced and implemented the latest and most comprehensive skills training approach to meet the current industrial requirements by emphasising social skills and social values (SSSV) (National Vocational Training Council [NVTC], 2005). Therefore, trainers are required to embed these SSSV unequivocally in teaching and learning of technical content. In this regard, trainers are expected to play an important role as facilitators to develop the employability skills required by the apprentices. To keep pace with rapid technological advancements in their occupational field and in the teaching profession, vocational trainers need to be

more knowledgeable than ever before. Trainers should be well aware of and understand the value of employability skills for apprentices. Furthermore, they should have the ability to integrate these skills during the learning process. Trainers must govern two important dimensions in the implementation of NDTS training, namely the social dimensions and the occupation-specific content of the work.

Vocational trainers need to be aware of and possess positive attitudes towards teaching employability skills if they are to apply or integrate them in planning their training programmes. Therefore, due to the lack of research into this matter, the researcher, who has experienced and been involved in trainer training programmes, feels strongly that this study needed to be carried out to explore the attitudes of trainers in vocational training institutions towards employability skills. This study was undertaken to encourage the capacity of trainers to exchange and apply ability and knowledge into new circumstances and situations of vocational training.

Purpose of the Study

This study fills in the wide gap related to employability skills in the Malaysian context. The focus on NDTS apprentices as the target group is to fulfil the current needs and demands in empowering skilled workers' contribution towards the national economy. Specifically, the objective of this study is to recognise the necessities of SSSV in the NDTS programmes from the perspective of the trainers in public and private training institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Focus groups (FG) discussions were chosen for this study to explain situations and current issues regarding the NDTS apprentices' SSSV as this study applied explanatory research methodology (Neuman, 2012). FGs are capable of generating discussions that expand ideas on certain matters (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004). The focus group is characterised as a research technique that utilises group interaction as an instrument to gather information (Morgan, 1996); this matches Berg and Lune's (2014, p. 166) depiction of FG as an interview method for small groups that is handled by moderators. The benefit of this technique is that it permits the researcher to investigate into people's encounters (Vaughan, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Thus, this study utilised qualitative data based on the focus group methodology to detail the trainers' personal encounters of SSSV in their training institutions.

This study selected a sample of public and private training institutions through a network of professionals. The sample in this study was representative of the various fields of work in which researchers have been attempting to contact as many participants from various institutions, both public and private skills training institutions. Forty respondents were reached through email to be given a description of the study. Of the 40, only 30 were willing to participate in

the study, of whom only 29 attended the FG sessions. All the participants had at least five years of training experience and represented the central regions of Selangor, Perak and Kuala Lumpur. From the participants, four FGs were formed, (N=7) and (N=8) who worked in various trades from different institutions.

Procedure

The FG sessions were controlled by moderators who facilitated the discussions that lasted approximately 150 to 180 minutes. The moderators ensured that the discussions were completed on time, periodically reminded the participants of the time constraint and asked them to conclude each opinion (Liamputtong, 2012). Morgan (1996) stressed three items that must be considered before any FG takes place. Firstly, as the FG is a method that is specific for gathering data, researchers must ensure that as much data as possible are collected. Secondly, as interaction during the FG is the prime source of data, all panel members should take part actively in the discussion. Lastly, the moderating researchers must participate actively to ensure the smooth running of the discussion so that no participant feels left out. If all the guidelines are adhered to, the discussions should run smoothly, be focussed and provide significant and useful information for the study (Hennink, 2007). Finally, the discussions should end with the moderator thanking the panel for their invaluable contribution and participation.

In the analysis, the coding themes relied on themes that have been published in past studies (Sail & Alavi, 2010). We first transcribed verbatim interviews using Digital Voice Editor 3 for each session. The transcripts were inspected thoroughly several times to get a complete viewpoint of the subject matter. The data were then analysed using the Atlas.ti version 7.5.9. Content analysis was conducted by the first author to identify key themes that emerged in the FG sessions. Interpretation of the data was done using standard analysis by Kvale (1996) to avoid bias as well as by other scholars who were involved with SSSV to validate the analysis. The themes were then matched and in the case of any conflict between the themes, the first author made adjustments to ensure that there was consensus on the themes. By using this method, the themes of this study could be categorised into technical competencies, learning and methodological competencies and efficiency of SSSV. However, the researchers created a new theme that arose from the analysis.

RESULTS

Despite the trainers' personal viewpoints of their experiences and the nature of SSSV at the first level of analysis, the FGs uncovered that SSSV were conceived similarly among Malaysian trainers as they are in Western nations. Most of the participants highlighted the same recognisable variables examined in developed countries and in Western research literature. This could explain how

globalisation has affected trainers by both developed and developing nations' work settings. As delineated in Appendix A, from the 241 statements recorded for analysis, we found that communication was portrayed as the most critical SSSV (25 statements), contrasted with technical competence and learning and methodological competence, as it reflects the capacity of a worker and how well he performs in an organisation.

The research findings provide evidence on the issues affecting NDTS apprentices. In general, the trainers supported the government's efforts on implementing the NDTS programmes, but a number of initiatives were incomplete due to financial constraints and a lack of apprentices. Based on the analysis, a few themes were identified and for each element studied there was a relationship with each individual SSSV.

Technical Competence

The findings from the FG sessions highlighted the fact that a majority of the trainers were satisfied with the NDTS technical apprentices' level of competency and ability. Initially, the trainers felt that NDTS graduates could adapt well in the workplace. This perception might be due to the fact that the training and workplace environments are quite similar. Apart from that, the trainers responded positively towards the NDTS graduates' ability to handle industrial equipment. The perspective was expected as each apprentice had already experienced handling similar equipment as they had spent 70 to 80% of their training time at industrial training institutions.

Learning and Methodological Competence

Every job requires workers to be knowledgeable and competent in order to perform well in it. The findings revealed positive feedback from the trainers on the NDTS apprentices' job competencies. However, a few trainers acknowledged that some apprentices might need more time to understand theoretical elements of given tasks. Providing more drills during training might trigger the interest of apprentices to learn additional knowledge to enrich their daily tasks.

Human and Social Competence

Human and social competencies form the social skills and social values (SSSV). Here, social skills refer to the approaches that one applies to communicate, solve problems, make decisions, manage self-discipline, work in a team, evaluate conceptually, interact with others and multi-task based on priorities. Meanwhile, social values are the self-beliefs or attitudes towards what is considered good, proper, appropriate and beneficial, among others, in the context of social relationships. Among the social values that an employee should have are work commitment, independence, concern and interest, high self-esteem, creativity and originality and loyalty (Sail et al., 2007, p. 73).

The trainers' perception of SSSV is important compared to occupational knowledge as it reflects the ability of workers and how well they perform in an

organisation. As illustrated in Appendix B, the findings showed some invaluable feedback on the NDTS apprentices' display of SSSV.

Interestingly, based on the analysis, a few new themes were identified, such as workers' mobility and entrepreneurship.

Workers' Mobility

Workers' mobility is a phenomenon that occurs when NDTS graduates are offered a better work package in terms of salary, position, facilities and environment. This affects their decision in choosing a new company or making a job hop. However, in terms of hair grooming and beauty care, mobility helps them improve their skills and experience.

Entrepreneurship

Findings from the study showed that NDTS graduates needed to be equipped with skills to add value in entrepreneurship to expand their potential in business. Added value can enhance their independence, leading them to earn a higher income compared to salaried workers. However, one employer in the automotive sector felt differently, explaining that the option to run a business depends on personal interest.

DISCUSSION

The social skills that were often highlighted by trainers were ability to communicate, ability to make decisions and ability to lead.

Overall, the majority of the respondents showed support for the NDTS programmes. They hoped that it would be continued and improved. Hence, continuous support and guidance from the management of the Department of Skills Development is needed to ensure that the target figure for competitive workers is achieved and fulfilled by the year 2020. More effective exposure must be introduced to increase the enrolment of NDTS apprentices in the work sector, apart from enhancing public awareness of the importance of skilled workers in the quest to achieve the status of developed nation.

CONCLUSION

This study found that NDTS trainers need workers who are not only skilled in technical ability but also in attitude and personality to positively impact their work performance (Rasul, Rauf, Mansor, Yasin, & Mahamod, 2013). It is hoped that the findings will provide the authorities concerned a clear picture of the actual scenario in the implementation of NDTS training schemes, especially in terms of employability.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1
Competencies in National Dual Training System (NDTS)

Competencies	Number of Statements
Communication Skills	25
Teamwork	20
Punctuality	17
Problem-solving skills	15
Technical skills	15
Self-learning of theories	15
Critical thinking	10
Entrepreneurship	10
Ability to multi-task based on priorities	10
Ability to handle industrial equipment	9
Decision making	9
Workers' mobility	9
ICT	9
Inclination to learn varied daily tasks	8
Learning skills	8
Job opportunities	6
Self-discipline	6
Self-esteem	5
Ability to work in various situations	5
Self-confidence	5
Leadership	4
Responsibility	4
Evaluation of concepts	4
Independence	3
Obedience	3
Creativity and originality	3
Industrial collaboration	2
Work commitment	1
Loyalty	1
Total	241

APPENDIX B

Table 2
Feedback on the NDTS Apprentices' SSSV

Feedback	Respondent
"We organise English Day once a week. Every Thursday is designated as English Day; hence, everyone is expected to communicate using English… It's okay if they use broken English… we don't mind. We will correct their usage."	Training Centre A
"It is not easy to control the NDTS students. They do not stay in the hostel, some will go back to their rented house and just loaf around with their friends. We are not happy… they enrol in the programme because they want the money, not because they want to study. We have no choice, but we have to appeal to them to come to class. It is the wish of their parents, not their own choice. However, there are also some who are good… very diligent."	Training Centre B
"The apprentices are skilled… they can do their jobs… However, when it comes to soft skills, they are quite poor at it. They do lack some skills. The problem is, we are not too sure how to train them to improve their soft skills."	Training Centre C
"So far, we do not have the experience to teach soft skills. In fact, we were not exposed to teaching social skills and soft skills. We just did what we thought we knew about soft skills. We focus on technical skills."	Training Centre D
"In my opinion, there should be certain procedures to learning social and soft skills. We train them based on what we understand. There are trainers who teach in the form of theories, while there are others who take the students for activities outside the classroom. It all depends on our own creativity."	Training Centre E
"To me, soft skills is not something that can be taught in the form of theories. We need to expose the students to actual situations in industry. There are quite a number of trainers who are baffled about how to teach soft skills."	Training Centre F
"We feel that it is very important that we get a good explanation on how to teach soft skills… as we are just doing what we think is right."	Training Centre G