COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING AND WORK PERFORMANCE OF THE SALES WORKFORCE IN A TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANY

By

ZAINAL BIN ABU ZARIM

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2004
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING AND WORK PERFORMANCE OF THE SALES WORKFORCE IN A TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANY

By

ZAINAL BIN ABU ZARIM

March 2004

Chairman: Associate Professor Hj. Saidin Teh, Ph.D.

Faculty: Educational Studies

Competent workforce is crucial for any organisation facing the global challenges and competition. Competency is very much linked to employee performance; and with proper competency and capabilities, it will increase productivity. The objective of the study is to examine the level of generic sales competencies of the sales workforce in a telecommunication company. Since competency-based training is an important element and antecedents for the competency level, the study examined the preferred learning styles of the respondents using Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory. The study also examined the relationship between the dependent variables (work performance) and selected independent variables.
A self-administered questionnaire was used as a mode of data collection with a sample size of 289 respondents. All instrument items used in the study were constructed by the researcher except for Kolb Learning Styles Inventory. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentage were used, besides t-test, ANOVA, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis were used for the statistical test.

The findings indicated that the preferred learning styles among the sales workforce were converger. In this style, they were motivated to discover the relevancy or “how” of a situation. The respondents also perceived that competency-based training was moderately effective, where only about 50 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the program. The major areas that required further improvements were contents of the module and instructional methods.

The study found that the competency level of the sales workforce was average. The study also found that there were weak relationships between work performance and respondents’ age, working experience, effectiveness of competency-based training and competency level. Eight competencies were found to have significant relationships with work performance; these were interpersonal skill, teamwork, business understanding, analytical thinking, marketing skill, selling skill, product
knowledge and sales strategy. Regression analysis confirmed that two variables contributed to the work performance; they were teamwork and business understanding.

This indicated that the competency of the employees and the teaching method should be considered as an important element for the employees’ performance and effective intervention programs needed to be carried out to narrow and ultimately close the gap.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

LATIHAN BERTERASKAN KOMPETENSI DAN PRESTASI KERJA DI KALANGAN ANGGOTA JUALAN DI SEBUAH SYARIKAT TELEKOMUNIKASI

Oleh

ZAINAL BIN ABU ZARIM

Mac 2004

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Hj. Saidin Teh, Ph.D.

Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Anggota kerja yang mempunyai kompetensi menjadi satu perkara yang penting kepada organisasi untuk menghadapi cabaran globalisasi and persaingan. Kompetensi sangat berkait rapat dengan prestasi kerja anggota. Dengan menggunakan kekompetenan yang sesuai and keupayaan anggota, ianya boleh meningkatkan produktiviti syarikat. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji tahap kompetensi anggota jualan di sebuah syarikat telekomunikasi. Oleh kerana latihan berteraskan kekompetenan adalah satu elemen yang penting dan merupakan input atau permulaan kepada pencapaian tahap kompetensi, kajian ini juga akan mengkaji gaya pembelejaran di kalangan anggota jualan dengan menggunakan "Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory (LSI)". Kajian ini juga
mengkaji perkaitan hubungan di antara angkubah bergantung (prestasi kerja) and beberapa angkubah tidak bergantung yang terpilih.

Soal-selidik kendiri telah digunakan untuk pengumpulan data dengan saiz sampel seramai 289 responden. Semua instrumen yang digunakan di dalam kajian ini telah direkabentuk oleh pengkaji melainkan “Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory (LSI)”. Deskriptif statistik seperti min, ‘standard deviation’ dan peratusan digunakan. Untuk ujian statistik, ujian-t, ANOVA, ‘Pearson product Moment Correlation’ dan ‘Multiple linear regression’ digunakan untuk analisis data.

Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa anggota jualan tersebut lebih cenderung kepada gaya pembelajaran jenis “Converger”. Dalam gaya ini, mereka lebih bermotivasi untuk mencari kesesuaian relevan atau lebih menekankan “bagaimana” sesuatu keadaan atau fenomena. Responden juga memberi persepsi bahawa latihan berteraskan kompetensi adalah sederhana efektif. Hanya 50 peratus daripada responden yang berpuashati dengan program tersebut. Bidang yang perlu diberi perhatian selanjutnya ialah kandungan program modul dan kaedah pengajaran.

Untuk tahap kompetensi, kajian ini mendapati bahawa anggota jualan memperolehi tahap sederhana kompetent. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa terdapat perhubungan yang rendah di antara prestasi kerja dan
umur, pengalaman kerja, keberkesanan latihan berteraskan kompetensi dan tahap kompetensi responden. Lapan kompetensi yang didapat mempunyai perhubungan yang signifikan dengan prestasi kerja, iaitu kemahiran interpersonal, kerja berpasukan, pemahaman perniagaan, pemikiran kritis, kemahiran pemasaran, kemahiran jualan, pengetahuan produk, strategi jualan. Di dalam analisis regresi, terdapat dua angkubah yang menyumbang kepada angkubah prestasi kerja iaitu kerja berpasukan dan pemahaman perniagaan,

Ini menunjukkan bahawa kompetensi anggota dan kaedah pengajaran perlu diambilkira sebagai satu daripada elemen penting dalam prestasi anggota dan program intervensi yang efektif perlu diadakan untuk mengurangkan jurang tersebut.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first note of appreciation goes to Allah (SWT) for the opportunity to pursue my doctoral degree. Most importantly, I am thankful to Allah (SWT) for enlightening and strengthening my spiritual self in the midst of constant tribulations in the pursuit of excellence.

I wish to extend my gratitude to (i) Associate Professor Dr. Hj. Saidin Teh, as the Chairman of my Doctoral Supervisory Committee for his counsel, valuable guidance, expert advice, coach and encouragement throughout the course of my program; (ii) The committee members: Y.Bhg. Professor Datuk Dr. Hj. Rahim Md. Sail, Associate Professor Dr. Bahaman Abu Samah and Dr. Khairuddin Idris especially on their inspiring advice and guidance on the contents of the thesis, the statistics, their patience and their constructive evaluations and for always being there when I needed them for their comments and suggestions.

I am also especially grateful to Professor Dr. Maimunah Ismail, Dr. Jamilah Othman, Associate Professor Dr. Turiman Suandi, Dr. Shamsuddin Ahmad, and Dr. Raduan Che Rose for their moral encouragements and assistance’s throughout my study. The Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education staff, En. Radzi and Pn. Kalsom, my sincere thanks for helping me with the administrative
arrangements. I would also like to acknowledge the interactions I had with fellow students, Abd Hair Awang, Norhisham, and their encouragements, which were indeed very much appreciated.

My appreciation is also directed to my employer for providing me the financial support and granting me the permission and assistance to conduct the survey. My special appreciation to my superiors, Y.Bhg. Datuk Ibrahim Md. Nassir, Y.Bhg. Datuk Syed Mustaffa Syed Ali, En. Md. Fauzi Said, En. Ismail Nordin and Tuan Hj. Zainuddin Ishak for their support and encouragements throughout my study. My staff, Cik Marzini Omar, Pn. Indon, En. Muhammad Fadzli and En. Azman Shah Mohamad who gave full supports and assistance.

Finally, I am very grateful to my wife, Norshida Bt. Abd Ghani for her love, assistance and support, and also my children, Muhammad Firdaus, Muhammad Imran, Aimi Zawani, Muhammad Annas, Ahmad Zaid and Ahmad Mu’az for their patience in enduring the time I spent to complete this study, and to provide the learning experiences of managing family effectively, concurrently.
I certify that an Examination Committee met on 15th March 2004 to conduct the final examination of Zainal Bin Abu Zarim on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled ‘Competency-based Training and Work Performance of Sales Workforce in a Telecommunication Company’, in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 198. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

**Y.BHG. DATIN SHARIFAH MD NOR, Ph.D.**
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

**HJ. SAIDIN TEH, Ph.D.**
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

**HJ. RAHIM MD. SAIL, Ph.D.**
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

**BAHAMAN ABU SAMAH, Ph.D.**
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

**KAIRUDDIN IDRIS, Ph.D.**
Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

**KAREN WATKINS, Ph.D.**
Professor
Department of Adult Education, College of Education
University of Georgia, Athens USA
(Independent Examiner)

**MAD NASIR SHAMSUDIN, Ph.D.**
Professor/Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

**HJ. SAIDIN TEH, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**HJ. RAHIM MD. SAIL, Ph.D.**  
Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

**BAHAMAN ABU SAMAH, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

**KHAIRUDDIN IDRIS, Ph.D.**  
Lecturer  
Faculty of Educational Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

---

**AINI IDERIS, Ph.D.**  
Professor/Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for the quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

ZAINAL BIN ABU ZARIM

Date:
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

**I INTRODUCTION**

1. Background of the Study 3
2. Statement of Problem 22
3. Research Questions 25
4. Objective 26
5. Significance of the Study 28
6. Assumptions 31
7. Scope of the Study 32
8. Limitations of the Study 34
9. Definition of Terms 35
   - Competency 35
   - Competency-based Training 37
   - Learning Style 38
   - Sales Workforce 40

**II REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

1. Introduction 42
2. The Concept of Competency 54
   - Competency Model 56
   - Competency Framework 59
3. Learning 71
   - Related Theories of Learning 77
   - Kolb's Learning Model 88
   - Learning Style Inventory 94
Accommodator 96
Assimilator 98
Converger 100
Diverger 101
Competency-based Training (CBT) 108
The Concept of CBT 110
CBT and Kolb’s Learning Model 113
CBT and Performance 118

III METHODOLOGY 128

Introduction 128
Research Instrumentation 130
Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory 134
Effectiveness of Competency-based Training 138
360-degree Feedback 140
Competency Assessment 140
Population and Sampling Procedure 144
Pilot Test 151
Data Collection 153
Data Analysis 155
Exploratory Data Analysis 157

IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 161

Profile of Respondents 162
Employment Group 162
Office Division 163
Office Location 164
Gender 165
Age 166
Working experience 167
Respondents’ Preferred Learning Styles 168
Matching Preferred Learning Styles and Teaching Method 173
Effectiveness of Competency-based Training 175
Training Topics 175
Training Objective 177
Trainees’ Satisfaction 179
Content of Sales Training Program 182
Instructional Method 184
Application to the Job 186